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CULTURE IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON  
ENGLAND

A STUDY WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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# CULTURE IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

*A STUDY WITH ILLUSTRATIONS*

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*By*

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To  
H. M. CHADWICK  
AND  
KEMP MALONE



## PREFACE

These chapters are based on a set of lectures given at the Johns Hopkins University during sabbatical leave of absence from Oxford University at the end of World War II, 1945. It was with great pleasure that I was able to accept the generous invitation of the University and to form links with members of the English staff which I trust will be lasting and of use to our subject.

The lectures represented work done during the war years, when university teachers not harassed by blitz were re-assessing their work in their special subjects, feeling doubtless as I did that it needed some new orientation. As an old student of Professor Chadwick's I inherited wide views about these studies and a firm belief in the values which Northern European culture (the barbarian over against the classical) had to and could give to the world. Professor Kemp Malone is well known as an active research scholar in the Anglo-Saxon field and it was his interest in my project which made this book possible.

The subject matter (apart from chapter IV on special technical points) is for the general public interested in early literature and art, and for the would-be student of our early culture. Something perhaps ought to be said about the literary shape of these chapters. It is of course in part a response to the needs of the audience to which I was asked to lecture, but not solely. The fact that neither a "reasoned" argument nor a chronological survey of the material of the period has been given is not accidental. The writer found in making her



survey that she came back again and again (as to a kind of high light in a picture or a motif in poetry or music) to certain themes or symbols, so that instead of a linear shape, she found she had drawn circles, arcs of circles, both intersecting and concentric, and this became the shape of the survey.

From its very nature the writer has had to draw heavily on scholarship on the period, from whatever country derived. Indeed a general survey would be impossible unless a considerable number of detailed studies had been made beforehand. It is therefore with a keen sense of indebtedness to literary, linguistic and archaeological scholars that these chapters have been written, though only a few could be mentioned by name.

As with the references to books, so with the illustrations used, they come from many different countries and it is a pleasure, through my list of Plates, to acknowledge with gratitude the permission given by various authorities to reproduce.

There has been one big difficulty in preparing this book. One of its aims was to coordinate more closely the material common to archaeology and literature. But in 1945 none of the Sutton Hoo objects could be examined even by students (not even the weapons, of which only verbal descriptions were accessible). The descriptions I gave of these objects therefore had to be at second hand. In 1946, on my return to Britain, the finds were being displayed to the public and one or two had been lectured on by archaeologists who had had access to the objects, but still there were difficulties. A footnote or a small insertion here and there seemed to be all that could be added to my text, in the circumstances. The provisional guide to the ship-burial which

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appeared this spring (1947) has not been available to me. I hope, therefore, that the reader will make allowances for any omissions he may notice and will use the two blank pages at the end for additional notes. The whole find is gradually being put on view in the British Museum.

I should like finally to thank The Johns Hopkins Press for its unfailing courtesy and assistance.

D. ELIZABETH MARTIN-CLARKE.

31 March, 1947.





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CHAPTER I  
THE AGE OF BEDE, *BEOWULF*, AND  
THE ARTS

INTRODUCTORY

In this my first chapter I am making an attempt to see as a whole a period of the culture of England, a period moreover not widely familiar like some of the other periods, say the Victorian Age. You will remember that in 1066 the Normans sailed across the English Channel, invaded and conquered England. The period I am writing about lies, in time, before that conquest. It is an Anglo-Saxon World to which I am introducing you, a culture which lasted for about five hundred years, stretching back from the great military defeat at Hastings. Its beginnings were associated with the coming of the Angles and Saxons to Britain from north Europe and with their conversion from paganism to Christianity. If I want to give you a unified view, it means that all the different aspects of the time are at my disposal and that I have to make a selection, and that a very limited one when I have only a little space available. For this essay is interrelated with the next four and a reader should regard all five as a unit. This method of approach can be used for many periods of study; thus, the Elizabethan Period in England would lend itself, for it has a homogeneous culture through all its rich diversity, or possibly the American poetic period localized in New England during the last fifty years of the nineteenth century might lend itself to a similar consideration.

You may wonder why I choose this period of so long ago. I do so because it is one of the main formative periods in the past of the culture of the United Kingdom. And as it is of ours, so in the dim backward and abyss of time it is of America's too. But because the English language of that day cannot be read without instruction, I am not using the literature as the central factor in my choice of material; I am using, instead, the archaeology of the period as a general framework to what I am going to write. And archaeology is especially useful for Anglo-Saxon study because in certain respects the literary records are fragmentary and therefore understanding of their full significance needs attention to contemporary objects of another kind. Alfred the Great in his introduction to a work translated from Latin said that the churches of England were stocked with treasure and books throughout the land until the wanton attacks of the Norse pirates who burnt and destroyed. In his time and later, England was under ceaseless attack from the Scandinavians and terrible destruction ensued. The result has been that many of our literary records have disappeared.

On the other hand, there is a richness of historical material and yet, we shall see, it in itself is not adequate. Take the century before the Norman Conquest: there appeared in England two poems known today as *Maldon* and *Brunanburh* (both battle-pieces based on actual fighting) which have in them the spirit of early English culture as no mere historical record has. They carry in them the quintessence of the spirit of a past age which the Anglo-Saxons had experienced five hundred years before, the Heroic Age of the Teutonic tribes. And from these poems rather than from any historical



document we can still feel the spirit of the past persisting into tenth-century England.

Let me illustrate by a few examples how using the different aspects of a period can contribute to better understanding; and in particular students of the Anglo-Saxon period should notice how these aspects interact and help each other, either by giving clearer focus or by establishing priority of importance. In *Brunanburh*, in accord with a bygone age, King Æthelstan of England is called *beorna beahgifa* (the ring-giver of warriors). Tennyson translated it "bracelet-bestower," and the poetic epithet kindles the curiosity if not the imagination, for today we speak rather of a king as wise and good. But this is a traditional phrase coined in a past age. Archaeology lends a hand, making the phrase more concrete when we know what these rings, these bracelets are like to look at and to feel. Examples of them are not only to be seen from graves in Britain but as far south as Russia, as far east as Sweden, and as far west as Ireland. As we might expect, such a spirit would be more obvious in seventh- and eighth-century England. And these remarks of mine may be compared with those of a well-known English historian, Professor Stenton, in his recently published *Anglo-Saxon England*, where in dealing with the Bretwaldas (Britain rulers) he suggests that this Anglo-Saxon title for an overlord resembles an heroic epithet like *beahgifa*. It belongs to heroic laudatory poetry like *Beowulf* rather than to accurate historical description. In his study of the historical material of this early period he notes that Edwin, a great king of Northumbria in the seventh century, is essentially a ruler of a barbarian type, expressing the spirit of the

Heroic Age, rather than anticipating King Alfred of the ninth century.

It is in *Brunanburh* too that, when the Norse pirates are put to flight, the poet sings that a miserable remnant of the Northmen sought Dublin in their clinker-built ships. The phrase used, *nægled-cnearrum*, literally means "nailed warships," and *nægled* (nailed) is a technical term to describe the only sort of ship which was thought highly of in the north of Europe. The old proverbial utterance, very old, indeed undatable, runs *scip sceal genægled* (i. e. our ships are clinker built). Again archaeology lends a hand and brings forward examples of clinker-built ships sailing the northern seas through the generations till the Viking Age, when they first reached the New World. The picture of the Oseberg ship gives an example of one of the best of these. Both the above examples show that the ideas of a past age, nay, its material creations and its very institutions, are being carried on into a later England, and the understanding of the history of the period is enriched by the study of poetry and archaeology.

What of the geographical approach? Here I will quote from Professor Chadwick, the man to whom I owe my interest in early English culture:

There are, of course, many other monuments of the period, besides works of art. A number of dykes are known to have been frontier fortifications of Heptarchic times—our towns themselves and our villages, our roads and boundaries and the whole face of our countryside, may be regarded in a sense as a legacy from that period, however much they owe to the works of previous ages.<sup>1</sup>

We are fortunate on the eastern side of the Atlantic in

<sup>1</sup> H. M. Chadwick, *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* (1941). Cp. Sir Cyril Fox's lecture on Offa's Dyke published by the British Academy.



our researches into the past, for we live in a territory strewn with monuments of the past.

Lastly we come to the language and in particular to the English vernacular in its earliest period of literary expression. We should remember that this period is also an age when the best seller in Latin literature (the language of official Europe) was produced in England: the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* of Bede, finished in 731. At this time too we have inscriptions on stone and metal in the Teutonic runic alphabet, and it is from this form of writing that our words *write*, *read*, and *book* are derived. But the early Anglo-Saxons did not associate written records with literature. The written tablet was used to denote ownership or to record a memorial; literature was perpetuated by recitation, which in turn was the result of both memory and improvisation. Here archaeology with its epigraphical material is of the utmost value to the understanding of this early period in the English language.

We have already said that archaeology by its range can give a framework to the whole period. It does something else: it forces the student to use his eyes. This not only makes literary and historical background into a picture but also makes the whole more concrete. Moreover, if you take up pencil or paintbrush you will find that your attention is further stimulated and so is your thinking. You begin to ask all sorts of questions about the construction and shape of the object you are trying to draw. This is especially valuable for the literary student as it makes him less literal minded and more alert to the symbolism which is the basis of all language. Incidentally, too, the use of the eye helps us all to become more internationally minded. The language bar-



rier is pulled down as it was with the silent movie and as it is with all great works of art. Perhaps I ought to say here that I define archaeology in its widest sense. Like other sciences, "it is essentially a method, of recovering, studying and re-creating the past."<sup>2</sup> The material may be prehistoric in time; it may be almost modern. The archaeologist relies on "things," the historian on documents.

These suggestions which I have outlined (with examples) seem to me more adequate as a method of approach and certainly less emphasized than the usual arguments put forward for a unified approach to the study of the Anglo-Saxon period. The reasons usually given, however, are very important and may be briefly summarized: archaeology is a handmaid to literature in enabling the student to read the actual texts of Old English literature more accurately, and to ascertain more fully the literary sources; it is a handmaid to history in that it helps with the historical problems of the period, i. e. the invasion of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons, the identity of the Jutes, etc.; it is a handmaid to language, for it may throw a little light on that obscure period when the English first landed in Britain and in particular through epigraphy help in our knowledge of the very early forms of words.

#### A PERIOD OF CULTURE IN EARLY ENGLAND

My aim then in these five chapters is to produce in the reader some realization of the wholeness of the culture of this period and to show him how it is related to

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Aileen Fox, *Place of Archaeology in British Education*, *Antiquity* XVIII.

its background and to the world of the past, until as the result of such focus he becomes aware of a characteristic early English civilization, an "Anglo-Saxon World." A world, because the 500 years before the Norman Conquest fall into two parts characterized by different traits and problems. The first part may be said to extend from the coming of the Angles and Saxons to Britain until the middle of the eighth century. The second part is coming to its fruition with the rise of the West Saxon kingdom in the ninth century and is characterized by King Alfred's successful stand against the Scandinavians, the consolidation of the kingdom in the tenth century and the national vicissitudes up to the coming of the Normans. Though the two parts together make the whole Anglo-Saxon cultural world, it is impossible within the limits of a few chapters to deal with both in order to illustrate my main theme, "wholeness." From the point of view of literary and artistic achievement, Period I is the richer, and we will focus attention on this. I am going to call it the Age of Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Arts: the BBA Age. A well-known American medievalist, Henry Adams, who wrote on thirteenth century unity, called his book *Mont S. Michel and Chartres*, from the two great works of genius of the period. The four following chapters take up the Ruthwell Cross, the epic poem *Beowulf* (two chapters), and the excavation and craftsmanship at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. All chapters are illustrated and as one of my aims is to show how pictures throw new light on written records, only by looking at the pictures carefully and at the obvious moment will the aim of this book be fulfilled. Students also should use their hands to measure and to copy, as well as that



inner common sense which most of us possess in estimating the practical utility of objects of everyday use. One complementary activity to reading should be to dig; the next, to visit museums to see the objects in the flesh. For the latter I hope countries are becoming steadily better equipped; there should be no difficulty, in an age of air transport, for the former.<sup>2</sup> Non-British students could fly to the United Kingdom (or to Europe) in the summer vacation and take part in the field work so often carried out there.

All this is a way of understanding the work of the medievalist and antiquary, the man or woman who has a concern to understand the past whether of his own country or of another, whether in one aspect or in several. He has, as I see it, to do at least two things today; he has to try to put the body of information he gets into its past setting and also to interpret it to himself and his contemporaries in terms of today so that they and he may be freshly rooted in it if it is their own past, and have a special understanding of it if it is the past of another country. The medievalist must not be medieval nor the antiquary antique. For actually he is a man living in the twentieth century and so not only does he have to reveal the past but he must also allow its relevant values to be built into modern life. People say there is a slump in the study of the arts but I wish to affirm there is valid utility about the study of the past: *argeweore sceal us to helpe weorthan*, work of the distant past becomes a help to us.

<sup>2</sup> The first batch of such students from the U. S. A. came to the United Kingdom in the summer of 1946 to give British archaeologists badly needed help in digging up blitzed areas.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AND MATERIAL

Archaeological material has mostly been discovered in Anglo-Saxon graveyards, and a brief historical survey of such discovery gives a framework to much of our material. It is necessary to remember at once that with the full acceptance of the tenets of the Christian Church the burial of objects with the dead ceases. Pagan cemeteries were used in England between the coming of the Anglo-Saxons and about A.D. 700 when Christian burials within the churchyards took their place. Of this date there are no written records extant, except a few charters. We should expect (and we find) a number of pagan graves with Christian objects and vice-versa. There must have been in England as well, as we know there were in Norway for a later period, some compromise burial forms on the part of pagan converts to Christianity. After this, for a thousand years there is neglect of the burial sites and not till about the seventeenth century with the revival of antiquarian interest is attention turned once more to the old burial grounds. Their true character however would often by this time have been forgotten and many would have been leveled. I recall that the stern end of the Sutton Hoo ship mound had been leveled by the plough within the memory of one of the workers who excavated it in 1939. However, before the time of systematic excavation, there appeared that unique book stimulated by the discovery of Norfolk urns, written by Sir Thomas Browne and called *Hydriotaphia* (Urne-Buriall). In the following century in the dig of the Royal Society at Chartham Down in Kent, we have one of the first systematic, ordered digs in the United Kingdom. As with



the researches into our English language in the earlier periods we are indebted to a small number of ardent scholars (including one woman at Oxford, Elizabeth Elstob), so it is to a few keen antiquarians that we owe archaeological activity before the nineteenth century.

In the middle of the eighteenth century Bryan Faussett, a clergyman, kept a careful diary of the finds he had made and about a hundred years later (in 1856) this was edited by C. Roach Smith under the title *Inventorium Sepulcræ*; while in 1793 James Douglas, to whom the Ashmolean at Oxford is so much indebted, published in *Nenia Britannica* an even more careful record of his own finds.<sup>4</sup> Faussett's name will ever be remembered as the finder of one of the most handsome pieces of Anglo-Saxon jewelry, the Kingston brooch, a very large gold disc with a most intricate garnet and filigree inlay pattern. From 1856 until just before the first World War not very much was done in England in the way of general critical survey, which was the urgent need, once finds had been excavated, but in that year Mr Thurlow Leeds (the retiring curator of the Ashmolean at Oxford) published his *Archæology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* and since then abundant articles and books have appeared.

#### ANGLO-SAXON BURIAL-GROUNDS AND BURIAL-MOUNDS

What were these burial-grounds like? Where were they situated? How arranged? How do they compare with those of today? A dozen other pertinent questions occur to us. On the whole, Anglo-Saxon folk were buried together as we are today, though there are single burials

<sup>4</sup> Faussett's collection is now housed in Liverpool Museum and is known as the Mayer-Faussett Collection. Cp. Plate XII.

like that of the Taplow barrow and the Broomfield grave.<sup>9</sup> And to these two kinds we now have to add the royal burial mounds at Sutton Hoo where it seems in a cluster of associated barrows each royal person had a mound to himself. Early maps show how thickly clustered Anglo-Saxon graves are in certain areas, i. e. in Kent and in parts of East Anglia, though it is quite clear many have still not been discovered. None of the English cemeteries are equal in extent to certain ones on the Continent: and though Bede reckons the South Saxon Kingdom at 7000 familiae, (? — 35000 persons) yet nothing like that number of graves has been uncovered. One of the vital things about archaeological study is that mother-earth has treasures of this native kind, still in store for the archaeologists.

The graves are not invariably on high ground, though we may note in the two pictures<sup>10</sup> of Folkestone and High Down near Worthing, near both of which I have lived for some time, that they lie 500 and 270 feet above the sea: in some Cambridge college playing-fields, however, they are in the river gravel. At Breach Down, Kent, our third picture, we note how like the modern grave the Anglo-Saxon one can be. These burials are by no means always on virgin soil: at Frilford, near Oxford, is an excellent example of a burial site used by successive invading peoples. Anglo-Saxon bodies are often found with Bronze Age burials and barrows, and even along Roman roads. The body at Taplow was laid in a mound which was full of Roman and earlier fragments, though it was apparently made expressly for the

<sup>9</sup> We might compare the modern unique burials of Cecil Rhodes in S. Africa and of George Washington at Mt. Vernon, Va. Compare also the portrait of the ship-burial grave at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. Plate I.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. Plate III.



Anglo-Saxon body. In the "Finn Episode" in *Beowulf* the funeral rites themselves were carried out in the presence of a barrow, and it would seem as if perhaps an already existing barrow was being used. We do not know whether these were what might be called communal cemeteries or whether our forefathers slept in their own village graveyards, as later they were to do around the Christian churches. There is no standard orientation of the bodies, nor are they always arranged in rows, as in the Saffron Walden picture.<sup>5</sup> Men are generally identified by their weapons; women, though not always, by their beads and keys. There would seem to be no class distinction: as Langland said much later, "in charnel atte chirche cherles ben yuel to knowe, or a knigte fram a knaue there." The position of the skeleton varies: sometimes it lies straight on its back, sometimes it is crouched, and on occasion it has been found dismembered. Sometimes a child is found buried with its parent. In the Caenby barrow the warrior was seated. There is no standardized posture. Referring to the seventeenth century excavations Sir Thomas Browne notes how shallow the graves are: "the bodies lie scarce below the roots of some vegetables." Modern graves are always deeper. And often beneath the head is a little pillow of dust. By no means all pagan graves contain grave goods. At Kingston (Kent) on the day when Faussett found the Kingston brooch and in the same grave no less than ten other objects, he tells us that he uncovered twenty-seven burials and twelve had nothing in them except the skeletons.

Finally, it is useful to compare descriptions like these with our own methods of burial and we must recall not

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Plate IV.

only inhumation but also cremation. In the latter, the burned fragments of bones were collected and placed either in a hollow in the ground, or under or in a clay receptacle. The grave goods when present are nearly all of the same kind—miniature objects like tiny keys, toilet accessories, and shears. It is not for me here to enter upon the technical problems arising out of cremated and inhumed bodies: it is enough to say that the mixture of the rituals is common in English cemeteries.

The range of objects found in these pagan graveyards is very large but they can be conveniently grouped together around three or four nuclei of attraction. First comes the hero warrior's equipment; second, the civilian outfit (both man and woman): and thirdly the contents and furnishing of the hall.

Our method of approach is to regard such objects for their utility value first and then for their decorative. The best way to appreciate the first is to handle the object. Looking at an object in a picture is to see it in the flat: we note the shape. To realize its form we need to touch it. Notice we say we copy the picture of an object but we draw the object itself. A cube is a useful illustration of what I mean: for there we find shape and form both present. The shape is the outside edge of the whole solid form. I suggest by thinking of the utility of certain objects we shall even from pictures get a sense of their form as well as of their shape.

#### CIVILIAN CLOTHING

For the whole make-up of the clothes of the Teutons (the larger unit to which the Anglo-Saxons belonged), only a very limited amount of reliable evidence is available, as material is so rarely preserved in the graves.



I have however seen an interesting exception to this in the moss finds of Denmark of the Migration Period. There in the museum at Copenhagen we saw trousers one thousand five hundred years old, but little the worse for wear! Like cricketing trousers they had a loop to hitch them up. We know these to be recorded as part of the Teutonic male dress. A good verbal description of the civil garb for men is found in descriptions of Charles the Great, a contemporary of the father of Alfred the Great, who loved his national dress and with the *trews*<sup>9</sup> wore a woollen and silk trimmed jerkin. His shoes had buckles and bands attached to them which were criss-crossed round the leg as far as the knee. Charles also wore a cape-like garment of fur and over this his mantle, clasped on the shoulder by a brooch. Around the waist of his tunic was fastened his belt and in this was stuck his sword or knife. Pictures are available of this type of dress in Carolingian MSS.

From the picture of a modern reconstructed dress of the Migration Period<sup>10</sup> you may see that the mantle is the garment which distinguishes it from the soldier's attire today. Trousers including shorts still remain the fashion for men, and notice that the model has been given a moustache. From seventh-century Anglo-Saxon Northumbria on a whalebone casket<sup>11</sup> we get further information. Here we see warriors carrying the typical Teutonic shield and holding swords; one of them is wearing what is apparently chainmail and also a distinctive helmet. A still more striking warrior outfit is

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Celtic *triubnas*. The name is still used in Britain for the tartan trousers worn by Scottish regiments.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. Plate VIII.

<sup>11</sup> Given by Sir Augustus Franks to the British Museum and known as the Franks Casket. Cp. Plate X, showing part of the Casket.

to be found on the Öland plates (Sweden): with these we deal in a later chapter.

Can we get similar information about what women wore? Tacitus writing before the Migration Period says that they were dressed much as men, except that their garment is generally made of linen adorned, but without sleeves, having the arms and part of the bosom uncovered. Later he adds that the Teutonic bridegrooms gave no frivolous trinkets to their brides on their wedding and the bride gave her husband his armor. As you can see on the carved ivory diptych from Halberstadt,<sup>11</sup> a sleeveless garment (? tunic) is worn by several women and on one at least, over a bare shoulder, a mantle is caught up with a brooch. On several garments too, there are signs of embroidery decoration. Some of the women have flowing locks while others have their hair knotted up on to the top of their heads. To the latter fashion reference is made in a later, but still heroic age, viz. the Viking Age. Here one of the goddesses named Fulla is "a maid and goes with loose tresses and a golden band about her head." You will see in the picture of part of the Franks Casket a figure representing the unfortunate lady from the Anglo-Saxon story of Weland. The carver has enveloped her in a mantle arranged over her head as a hood, in her hand she carries her bag. Several good examples of the use of the mantle are visible in this picture.

But I am wanting to stress, in the examination of such objects, something besides their general appearance. Whereas in the graves practically nothing of the material of clothes has been found, there have been found in large quantities the metal objects which hold

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Plate XI.



garments together. Let us now consider in turn some of these, the brooch, buckle and clasp.

### BROOCH, BUCKLE AND CLASP

The brooch known archaeologically as the fibula is essentially related to the mantle and had already been used by the Romans to hold the garment becomingly on the shoulder. The Teutons imitated them and found the brooch an opportunity for great ornament. To appreciate fully the utility of this gadget you want to realize that it has developed in shape and use, out of the pin. By twisting an invisible hair-pin anyone can see how the safety-pin brooch has come into being in its simplest form, and then developed and improved in utility and ornament. There is a great range of Anglo-Saxon brooch shapes from the purely circular (the disc), to the handsome cruciform. Every brooch, other than the disc, consists of a head (which hides the spring), a foot (which covers the clasp) and the middle part, or bow (behind which is the pin). They were made of gold, bronze and iron. One of the most handsome cruciform brooches is preserved in Hull Museum: it is  $5\frac{3}{16}$  inches long and made of bronze. The picture of this brooch shows its morphology well and at the same time makes one realize how handsome and well proportioned the best of the Anglo-Saxon brooches can be. It is known as the Londesborough Brooch.<sup>12</sup> You should visualize men and women with these handsome brooches holding their mantles on their shoulders, or their tunics at their throats. The Anglo-Saxons loved their peasant jewelry and one old lady, in her grave in the recent

<sup>12</sup> Cp. Plate XIV.

Nassington find<sup>18</sup> (Mr Thurlow Leeds told me), was wearing no less than three brooches typical of three different generations. Students will remember how the royal ladies in *Beowulf* and other heroic poetry have attached frequently to their names the adjective *gold-hroden* (gold adorned) and the brooch together with necklace and hair ornament would be included in this descriptive adjective.

We noticed that the Romans were already accustomed to wear the brooch with the mantle before the Teutons adopted the same fashion, but the development in the use and shape of the buckle is especially characteristic of the Teutons, for with them dress was less flowing and more tightly braced than with the Romans. Buckles could be of varying size and strength according to the use they were put to. We have already noticed that both men and women wore a belt round their tunics and this was clasped by a buckle. With the men at any rate this would have to be very strong and large as the belt had to hold both a knife and a purse. Indeed we know of a Teutonic buckle 15 inches long and 3½ wide. The developed buckle consists of two or even three parts, the plate in one piece with the buckle itself and a complementary back plate to which it was riveted. Most of our modern belts in England have the simple buckle, round the pin of which the material is fastened, but by the Anglo-Saxon fashion, one got a great chance of ornament on the additional plates of the buckle, sometimes even of using precious stones, garnets, gold and lapis lazuli. There was sometimes a third plate fastened to the belt, independently

<sup>18</sup> Cp. E. T. Leeds and R. J. C. Atkinson: An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Nassington, Northants., *The Antiquaries Journal*, XXIV.



of the buckle, to which the buckle ring was drawn up tight when the belt was fastened for use. Some of these buckle plates are ornamented with knobs which have developed from the heads of the rivets with which originally they were fixed to the belt stuff. We also find in Anglo-Saxon tombs numerous small buckles or rather clasps that would be needed for fixing the cross gartering. These too are found again and again on the wrists of skeletons, obviously to hold the sleeve together. They are much commoner in the United Kingdom than on the Continent and Mr Baldwin Brown<sup>14</sup> suggests they may be a fashion of the Midlands.

#### PROCESSES

But this material of the life of the Anglo-Saxons can be regarded from other points of view. It can be assessed as a craft or appreciated as a pattern. Let us consider first one of the characteristic processes of the jeweler's craft, called filigree work, illustrated in the picture of the handle of a dagger from Windsor.<sup>15</sup> By it serpent forms and a twisted cable of gold wire are soldered on to the metal surface. Sometimes such strands are granulated and when it is well done, each globule is soldered down separately. On this pommel at intervals we find minute bunches of berries soldered in just this way. This is not an original process, neither is it peculiar to the Anglo-Saxons, but they have produced some remarkably fine examples of it and this is one of the best. The picture here is reduced.

<sup>14</sup> Cp. G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, 7 volumes: a store-house of archaeological information to which all writers on Anglo-Saxon archaeology must be indebted.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Plate XIII.

Another process popular with the Anglo-Saxons is niello work. It is well known from two handsome royal Anglo-Saxon rings in the British Museum. One belonging to Æthelwulf, the father of Alfred, is inscribed with his name and also with a pattern of two peacocks—a Christian design. A smaller ring is inscribed with the name of Æthelswith, the sister of Alfred. On its bezel is the *Agnus Dei*. Both were found by chance in the countryside, and both are worked in niello process; a black paste inscribed into other metal, gold or silver. It is to be noted that these fine specimens both belong to a later period: they are referred to here because they are the personal possessions of royalty, and because illustrations of the niello process are also found at Sutton Hoo.

It is only fair to Anglo-Saxon jewelers to give a picture of one of their finest productions, The Kingston Brooch. On it we have what is known as garnet inlay, or cloisonné work. Inlaid work can be carried out in two ways, by the use of cloisons or cells fastened to the metal surface and into which the sliced garnets or other stones are fixed. In the other type of inlay the cell is partly sunk into the ground work, and this is called *champlevé*. The former is the characteristic decoration of the Kingston Brooch; some fine examples of both processes are found on Sutton Hoo objects. If, as in the roundels on the Kingston brooch, the garnets are not sliced but project, the technique is known as *en cabochon*.

The Anglo-Saxon eye liked a polychrome effect, and you must think of this brooch<sup>14</sup> as gleaming with dif-

<sup>14</sup> Cp. Plate XII. Diameter, 3½ inches; rim thickness ¼-⅜ inch. It consists of two plates of gold fastened with a bronze pin on the back



ferent colors, gold, red, blue and white. The design on the brooch is elegant and rich, showing a sense of proportion allied with pleasure in variety, so that we feel the jeweler had a sense of pattern as well as marvelous skill in workmanship. I still wonder how the detail could be dealt with without a magnifying glass, the use of which is known in dealing with minute enamel work in the bazaars in India today. But we may note here that examples of inlaid enamel work are not common among the Anglo-Saxons. Enamel incrustation did not catch on as did garnet inlay.

This interest in work in precious stones is well expressed in some lines from the Old English poem, *Phoenix*, and these lines are original to the poet. Translated they mean: "Its eye steady and in color very like a gem, a fair jewel, when it is placed by the skill of goldsmiths in its gold socket."<sup>27</sup> *Goldfæt* is glossed *bractea, lamina aurea*, i. e. a thin plate of gold; exactly, a cloison.

We may understand similar technical descriptions in the lines from the Cottonian collection of *Gnomes* which run in translation: "a precious stone is set in a ring prominent in its wide setting"<sup>28</sup> (i. e. not cut flat, and

plate, held by a catch fashioned like an animal's head. The centre of the brooch face contains a boss raised and marked out in cells. Between it and the circumference are four roundels and four straight bars, suggesting an equal-armed cross. Five concentric bands combine with these to produce a number of various shapes, which are again arranged to take the thin cloison strips. The colours on the brooch are red, blue and white, while some of the spaces are filled with filigree patterns.

<sup>27</sup> Cp. *Phoenix* lines 301-304

*Is seo sagesbyrd  
stearc and hime stans glicast,  
gladum gimme, thonne in goldfate  
smitha orthoncum biwetad weortheth.*

<sup>28</sup> Cp. *Cotton Gnostic Verses* lines 22-23

*Gim sceal on hrings  
Standan steap and gearp.*

therefore en cabochon). Garnets were often fixed like this and then known as carbuncles. When on the other hand, the gems were sliced, the goldsmith placed gold foil<sup>19</sup> beneath them to shine through and make the stones more radiant. I have seen little pieces of this displayed in the Ashmolean Museum with a criss-cross pattern on them to make them more effective. In *Beowulf* is used the compound word *sincfæt* (lit. the treasure vessel) and from its context describing the beautiful necklace, the *Brosingamene*, it would seem to have a similar meaning.

#### OUTSTANDING ARTISTIC PRODUCTION OF THE AGE

For it is after outstanding objects of art and literature that we have named our period Bede, *Beowulf* and the Arts. Of almost none of these do we know the name of the maker. The author of the Ecclesiastical History of the English People (in Latin) is known to all time as the Venerable Bede. The date of his book is 731, and of his life c. 677-735; he lies buried in Durham Cathedral. His book is steeped through and through with an especially beautiful spirit characteristic of the Christianity which the north of England was enjoying at this time. When Bede was only seven years old, he went into a monastery to be educated by a famous abbot, Benedict Biscop. He was taught Latin and Greek and he says that in his day some spoke these languages as fluently as their mother tongue. He felt his vocation to be that of a student, and divinely inspired, he wrote many books for the help of his church while living within monastic walls. But he was one of

<sup>19</sup> Cp. Old English *gold-fell*, *gold-larfer*.



our first historians as well and he is most strict in giving us the sources of his material.<sup>20</sup> The second selected object is the epic poem, *Beowulf*.<sup>21</sup> It contains 3182 lines and in its poetic achievement, although not equal to, may be compared with the Iliad and Odyssey. When we remember that the Anglo-Saxons at the time were the barbarians from the north who had overrun Roman civilization in Britain and were to consolidate themselves into nationhood, we realize the importance of this literary monument. Unlike Bede's work, it gives voice to both Christian and pagan sentiments and I deal with it in chapters III and IV. In my fifth chapter I describe the objects excavated at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, in 1939. I am using chapter II for the examination of another remarkable object of art of this age, the sculptured Ruthwell Cross, unequaled elsewhere in contemporary Europe, and on part of which are inscribed a few lines of an Anglo-Saxon religious lyric which is equal in its kind to anything the English language possesses.

But first a few general reflections on this extraordinarily fertile creative age of English culture. To begin with, it is an age of conversion to Christianity: we note we find in it on the one hand an essentially Christian spirit, on the other a crude, pagan quality. Bede tells of the growth of the Christian church and of its consolidation, and he illustrates the struggle of these opposite qualities at issue with one another in everyday life. On the one hand we hear of kings living saintly lives and on the other of rulers given up wholly to "idolatry, altogether heathen and unenlightened." We

<sup>20</sup> I have used for reference *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, translated by Thomas Stapleton, 1865.

<sup>21</sup> Cp. Guumere, *The Oldest English Epic*, for translations from *Beowulf* not credited to others.

find Sigbert who became ruler of East Anglia, entering a monastery through devotion to God; and on the other hand we find in East Anglia at about the same period a royal ship-burial which is wholly pagan. My first point of importance then is that the age reveals intersection of both Christian and pagan spirit.

Next, at the beginning of our period we see the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain is a landmark in their development, for though the Roman legions had left, they found in Britain remains of a finer culture than their own. Bede says the Roman occupation of Britain may be seen "by the cities, temples, bridges, and paved streets to this day remaining": the Anglo-Saxons admired this culture so much that they constantly imitated classical form and pattern,<sup>22</sup> though at the same time they were deeply moved by the pathos of its decay. The beautiful fragment of the poem called "Ruin" shows that at least one poet was inspired by melancholy meditation on these Roman buildings falling into decay:

Bright were the palaces, baths were set in the palaces,  
Gables high assembled, there was the press of people,  
Many a hall to sup the mead, so rich with joys for men,  
Till time when Fate the strong rescinded that!

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<sup>22</sup> This is well exemplified in a series of monuments belonging to the early seventh century and situated in the south-east corner of England. I refer to six early Christian Churches known to have been set up at the time of the Conversion, one of which is within the Roman fort of Reculver. We may note for example that the well-known fragments of the cross, probably about the same date as the Ruthwell, taken from Reculver Church obviously belong to a shaft which is tubular in shape and in style essentially classical. This cross is known to have stood at the entrance to the Chancel at Reculver, between two of the pillars which formed an arcade dividing chancel from nave. These two pillars are now preserved in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. They are clearly classical though their capitals are unorthodox in shape, and their tubular shape is almost certainly the model for the Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft.



For then they shrank as pestilence came,  
Pest took their strong pride. As for their towers,  
Their prime fortress was waste foundations,  
And men who could restore it in a multitude fell down.<sup>33</sup>

Were you to visit Kent today you would still see in the south-east corner remains of the great Roman fort of Richborough; and in the north-east that of Reculver with its early Christian church. At the beginning of our period across the narrow channel on the opposite shore to Kent the Franks were moving from Germany onto the rivers Seine and Loire, consolidating the Merovingian Kingdom. We shall see in following chapters that close contacts with their works of art survive. Across the water much further to the north and east lay Scandinavian kingdoms and we shall find in *Beowulf* again and again that it is to them we turn to find support for the detailed descriptions of objects and the lavish account of treasure characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon poem. The heroic age of the peoples in *Beowulf*, A. D. 350-550, was a time of great historic activity for the tribes who play so important a part in the story, Scyldingas, Geatas, and Swedes; though it is clear that only one event in the poem can be vouched for historically.<sup>34</sup> The period following it within Britain, politically was a scene of warring peoples: the Britons on the defensive against the oncoming Anglo-Saxons; the latter in smaller or larger groups invading or settling territory; and in their turn conquered by, or agreeing to, a larger confederacy with an overlord. A political map of Britain in these seventh and eighth centuries shows a division,

<sup>33</sup> Cp. Gavin Bone, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry, an Essay with specimen translations in verse*, 1943.

<sup>34</sup> Cp. *Beowulf*, lines 1202 ff., 2354 ff., 2501 ff., and 2915 ff.

a south and north Anglo-Saxon Kingdom with the River Humber as boundary and the British Kingdom of Elmet (in the earlier years) between the two.

It is the realization that the Anglo-Saxons by their move into Britain are in the stream of several different cultures and that this is one of the controlling factors in their own artistic production that is so important. So we shall find that the cultures of the Romans, British, Irish, Scandinavians and Franks all play their part in the cultural activities of the Anglo-Saxons. Intersection of cultures brings forth the new. It is this period too that, after a struggle, sees the consolidation of the Christian church. Not only pagan and Christian but two differently organized Christian churches, Roman and Celtic, fought for the pagan soul. At the Conference of Whitby in 664 the Roman organization won.

## CHAPTER II

### ANGLO-SAXON SCULPTURE: THE RUTHWELL CROSS

Let us now examine the Ruthwell Cross, trying through some detailed appreciation of its beauty and meaning to see how it mirrors and unifies the different elements we know are present in this age of Bede, *Beowulf* and the Arts. It is especially useful, for it exemplifies not only art but poetry and religion. As a work of art, moreover, it is representative. Though the best of its kind, it is only one of thousands of crosses in the north of England (crosses mostly preserved only in fragments) which date from this period. There is nothing to equal these sculptured crosses in the whole of contemporary European art.

First the reader must appreciate their size; some rise to 20 feet and the Ruthwell Cross itself is 18 feet high, three times the height of a tall man. The date generally accepted for it ranges from the late seventh to the middle of the eighth century,<sup>1</sup> the latter half of the period we are studying. It is preserved at Ruthwell<sup>2</sup> (pronounced locally [Riv!]), north-west of Carlisle, near the English and Scottish border. It was transferred in the last century from the grounds of the parsonage into the church itself. You must notice in the picture that

<sup>1</sup> Cp. J. Brøsted, *Early English Ornament*, English translation (1924); but note W. G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (1927). Cp. also G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England* (7 vols.).

<sup>2</sup> There is also a good model preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



the head of the Cross<sup>2</sup> has been fixed on the wrong way round; for at a time when so many works of art in the United Kingdom were mutilated, the Cross too suffered, and when restored was restored wrongly.

Next, note in the illustration, its rectilinear shape with two broad and two narrow sides. It is made of reddish sandstone, which has weathered badly in parts. In shape it has a broader plinth rising about 3 feet, and it tapers slightly to the cross piece or transom. On the broader sides, it is decorated with panels of sculptured figures of different size: on the narrower, with vine leaf pattern. The largest panels<sup>3</sup> which attract the eye are, in the front, Christ in Majesty with no spear but standing on two animals that look like swine, which are hold-up their hoofs as if in worship: exactly behind this and similar to it in shape is again the upright figure of Christ with the bowed figure of Mary of Magdalen<sup>4</sup> at His feet, with a dramatic gesture drying them with the hair of her head.

Even a superficial glance will emphasize the gauche appearance of this figure, especially when compared with those of Christ in both these panels. The one is the gracious representative type of figure with which one is so familiar, in classical, especially Greek art: the other is of the barbarian north, stressing most impressively the dramatic emotion of action rather than the elegance of form.

On the front, below Christ in Majesty, is the meeting

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Plate V, and G. Baldwin Brown, *op. cit.* Vol. V (1921) with chapters on Runic epigraphy, by A. Blyth Webster.

<sup>3</sup> All students of this cross are much indebted to M. Schapiro, *The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross* (1944) and to F. Saxl, *The Ruthwell Cross* (1943), *Warburg Institute*, London.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Plate VI.

of the two hermits of the desert, Paul and Anthony and their sharing a loaf between them. Below this is a panel representing the Flight into Egypt (just a bit of Joseph visible here), and below that probably a Nativity, though nothing remains of it. Above, we find a very genial John the Baptist with the lamb in his arms, launching the Lamb of God. And, above that, perhaps Matthew the apostle with his gospel symbol, a man. Then if the cross-head is turned the right way round we get above that, on the top, a man with an eagle. Can it be St. John with his symbol, the eagle, piercing heaven with its gaze?

On the back, starting with the Magdalen panel, downwards we find Christ healing the blind man<sup>\*</sup> (St. John ix), interesting because Jesus holds a rod in His hand and only early Church versions give this detail of the story. The miracle is a popular one in the early Church. Below this is a beautiful Annunciation<sup>†</sup> of which I give a picture; and below that the Crucifixion. Above the Magdalen panel is a Visitation; next an Archer; and with the cross-head the right way round, at the top, a Bird. Is it an eagle which the archer, below, is aiming at?

The reader should examine closely the enlarged picture of the Magdalen and Blind Man panels; examine them, both to enjoy their form and see further details in them. He should think of the use of the limited area of any cross as the setting for successful artistic design. We have to remember the need of dignity and stature for the figure of Christ in addition to the nobility required by the classical concept. The treatment of the

<sup>\*</sup> The fact that Christ has a moustache links it with the Rothbury Cross where in the treatment of the same subject the blind man is given a moustache, a non-classical feature in art.

<sup>†</sup> Cp. Plate VII.



drapery, with its open neck, is non-classical whereas the book in the left hand and the right hand raised, may derive from the Far East.

The panel below, though not as impressive, raises another question. Why was this subject of healing the blind man chosen at all?

Our picture of the Annunciation though showing the panel as very much worn, also reveals it as beautiful, flowing and light in treatment. What is the angel Gabriel holding? You should compare this treatment with others of this very much loved subject in religious art.

On the narrow side of the Ruthwell Cross you will see a graceful flowing spiral work of vine in which birds and animals peck at the branches. Although appearing in a variety of forms, this is a popular motif and comes from far afield. It may too, be symbolic and represent the living vine described in St. John xv. On the other great cross preserved at Bewcastle, of about the same date, there is foliage scroll work in panels side by side with geometrical intertwined pattern. It has, however, only three panels with sculptured figures, those of John the Baptist, John the Evangelist (?) and Christ in Majesty: we know it was erected to commemorate a King of Northumbria and his wife.

And so we come to the main question of the Ruthwell Cross—viz., Why has the artist selected just this set of subjects? In a great religious symbol like this, we do not expect to find a set of miscellaneous objects unco-ordinated, but subjects which make a unit and are integrated one with another revealing the aesthetic and religious experiences of the author. My consideration

\* Cp. Plate V.

of this has been much helped by the learned and suggestive papers of Schapiro and Saxl.

The whole scheme, as I see it, is embraced by the panels at the bottom and top of the Cross; on the plinth in a basic position we have a Crucifixion and probably a Nativity, both acting as the foundation of Christ's life. The almost certain use of the Evangelists and their symbols on the head of the great cross, is very appropriate, pointing the way as they do to the heavenly: it is proper that such aspiration should be founded on the life of Christ embraced by the Nativity and the Crucifixion.

The large panel subjects of Christ in Majesty and the Magdalen scene suggest special importance both by their size, and their position on the cross which makes them a focus of attention. Their Latin inscriptions help us to understand them. In the first we find Christ adored by the animal world, a motif dear to the heart of the Celtic Church and one associated by Eusebius, an early Father, with the temptations and asceticism in the desert. The other panel of Mary\* may represent again, on the one hand, asceticism ('the better part'), and on the other the Magdalen. It is interesting to see that the uniting of these ideas in her, is already known in seventh-century England. The panel of the meeting of the two hermits, Paul and Antony, popular figures of the Church of the day, suggests the same idea of asceticism and is a favorite with the early Church; also we may note they are fed by an eagle, one of the animal world. Here too we might include the Flight into Egypt.

But how are we to understand the use of the remain-

\* Cp. Plate VI.



ing subject-panels? How are we to fit in the blind man healed, the Visitation, the shooting by the archer, and finally the figure of the eagle on the top of the cross? The unifying element has not yet been recognized. And yet with a great work of art like the Ruthwell Cross, we cannot have a set of miscellaneous themes gathered together, as we well might do on the Franks Casket. But we have seen that the religious themes belong to both branches of the Christian Church, Roman and Celtic; that the artistic features embrace Celtic, classical and barbaric art motifs and come from as far afield as the Mediterranean and the Near East.

To sum up, here we have a mighty cross representing Christ's life, with the nativity and crucifixion at the base upholding the idea of his life and death. It presents also certain values emphasized by the early Church to do with the animal (natural) world and also with spiritual discipline. The art itself reveals pagan elements, classical Christian art from Europe and even from the Near East. We must note important intersection of artistic influences.

#### THE POEM ON THE RUTHWELL CROSS

But literature as well as art is represented here. Along the edges of the cross we find in old runic lettering four short groups of verse,<sup>10</sup> part of a long poem known as the *Dream of the Rood* and preserved in the Anglo-Saxon codex, the Vercelli MS.<sup>11</sup> This is equal to any short religious poem in the world.

<sup>10</sup> These lie between lines 39 and 63 of the text of the poem extant in the Vercelli Book.

<sup>11</sup> The complete poem is 156 lines long with at least one half line (76) missing. It was edited by B. Dickins and A. S. C. Ross (1934) and by A. S. Cook (1935).



It depicts a poet's dream in which we see three different crosses. First, there is a stupendous Cross shaft in the sky, surrounded with an aureole of light, revealed as the centre of every gaze, eternally, the cosmic Cross,<sup>12</sup> throughout the universe. But its form is merged into a second cross, a cross of shame and suffering. And this in its turn becomes a third Cross, laden with treasure and decked with ritualistic symbols, viz. the processional Cross used in Church services. One cannot help wondering if the first Cross high in the heavens was not the result of a poet's vision, though we know it has literary ancestry as well. I was reminded of the description of this cross when during World War I the English press related that a mighty Cross had been seen by a number of people in East Anglia, suspended in the sky. Moreover, in 1826 in France, when a priest was telling the legend of Constantine to three or four thousand people, a cross 80 feet long appeared in a cloudless sky after sunset. But the story with which the poem of the Dream is certainly in some way connected is the legend of the Emperor Constantine, related by Eusebius<sup>13</sup> in the fourth century A. D. In it, he had a similar vision: after which, he had an image of a cross made, which always preceded him into battle. We know from historic records that after Constantine's vision the image of cross and crucifix was adopted into Western European life as a symbol.

The treatment of the second cross, the cross of shame, is even more striking. The cross tells its own story: how it is cut down from its tree-roots, and set up to

<sup>12</sup> This idea of the cosmic cross is well expressed in John Donne, *Divine Poems* (The Cross).

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*.

bear malefactors; how the Christ, a young hero-warrior, and at the same time Almighty God, mounts the gallows: that the Cross would fain have bowed in reverence but that it had to do its duty, stand erect and support the divine hero. Without concealment it tells the suffering and sorrow that fell on the whole of God's creation that such a thing should be, lamenting the fall of a King and of God. There follows a description of Christ's burial, the carving of a shining marble tomb and the chanting of the dirge for the dead. Darkness fell and his followers left the dead Christ alone, his corpse, the house of His spirit. These parts of the poem seem to me notably to be a synthesis of pagan and Christian, and also to compare in a degree with the sculpture on the cross. The deep respect of the natural (i.e. animal) World for Christ in Majesty on the sculptured panel is paralleled by the deep sympathy of the natural (inanimate) wood of the tree, in the poem, for the dying Christ.

In translation the passage reads: "A pall of darkness and gloom advanced over the world. All creation wept, every living creature, lamented the death of the King"<sup>14</sup>—this should be compared with the lament by all nature for Balder, the young pagan god: "Thereupon the Æsir (gods) sent over all the world messengers to pray that Baldr be wept out of Hel; and all men did this, and quick things, and the earth, and stones and trees, and all metals"<sup>15</sup>. . . . Here the idea in the Christian story

<sup>14</sup> Lines 54 ff.

*Sceadu forðeode,  
wann under wolcnum. Weop eal gæceast,  
cwæððon Cyninges fyll . . .*

The literary theme ascribing emotion to an inanimate object is characteristic of riddle literary tradition.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Prose Edda, translated by A. G. Brodeur (1915), p. 74.



is completely in tune with that expressed in the pagan myth, viz. sympathy of the human and natural with the divine.

Another idea, too, in my view, may well be compared with pagan thought. The cosmic cross is said to reach to the "corners of the earth": it is also called *beama beorhtost*, the most glorious of trees. To the Christian and student of Old Testament legend, Daniel iv would be in mind: "I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth." This tree of the Old Testament<sup>16</sup> would recall to a mind already sympathetic to pagan myth, the Teutonic myth of the World Tree, *Yggdrasils Ash* or *Minameithr* whose branches spread over all lands,— "about which no one knows from the roots of what (tree) it springs." Again in the Old Norse poem the *Hávamál*,<sup>17</sup> a profounder mythological belief is suggested according to which the god Othin wounded by a spear hung for nine whole nights on this wind-swept tree, "given to Othin, myself to myself . . . I peered downwards. I took up the runes . . . Then I began to be quickened and full of wisdom, to grow and to thrive" —The idea of the cosmic cross is a most profound con-

<sup>16</sup> The description of this tree given in the Old English *Daniel* is fuller than the A. V. quoted in the text:

*Thukto him, thæt on foldan fære stode  
wudabeam wlitig, ær wæs wyrtrum fæst,  
beorht on bladum: næs he beorwe gelic  
ac he hlifode to heofontunglum,  
swilca he oferfæthmas folden sceatas,  
ealne mildungeard oð mere streamas  
twigum and telgum, thær he to gearaþ:*

<sup>17</sup> The *Hávamál*, translated and edited by D. E. Martin-Clarke, Str. 133-140. Cp. Introduction, pp. 33 ff. Cp. also *Fjölsvinnsmál*, Str. 19 and 20.



cept to be found in this early vernacular poem,<sup>18</sup> but may it be that an old pagan myth is also embedded in this account of the crucifixion? As Taylor says in his *Medieval Mind*, "the Gospel of Christ in spreading throughout the pagan world was certain to gather to itself the incidents of its apprehension by pagans." When the Anglo-Saxon poets deal with the Hebrew myth of Genesis (the Fall of the Angels and the Fall of man in *Genesis B*), or with Church apocryphal legend (as in *Judith*), it is interesting to note how they see these themes in their own heroic tribal context and pattern. And in the *Dream of the Rood*, with the well-known heroic vocabulary and metre, the much fuller appreciation of the mystery of the crucifixion, its shame and its glory, still shows old pagan beliefs lurking, whether of Balder or of Othin.

Yet one more cross is described in this poem, often arising out of the Cross of shame and suffering, viz. the processional cross laden with treasure and ritualistic symbol. This certainly has literary association with that

<sup>18</sup> It is the phrase *æt foldan sceatum* which is of special interest describing the cross-tree as penetrating to the four corners of the earth. This may well echo the pagan Teutonic idea of the world tree. Associated with the world tree in a remarkable way in the Old Norse poem quoted above is a myth about the sacrifice of the god Othin. Although the text is obscure it would seem that Othin in this way learnt certain mysteries (*runar*) and was rejuvenated. In the *Cult of Othin*, Professor Chadwick shows that sacrifice by hanging and stabbing with a spear is deeply rooted in the Othin Cult of the pagan north, and need not be attributed to Christian influence. About 65 years ago Carl Blind found in the Shetlands a Christianised version of this myth.

The *Hávamál* Strophes are incomplete. Do they mean, however, that Othin wins knowledge of "mysteries" by penetrating into the world of the dead? Or is the ritual associated with the gathering of herbs, growing near a dead body?

The Crucifixion on the Ruthwell Cross is very much worn: and it was a much later English artist William Blake who depicted Christ as crucified on the world tree.

described by Eusebius, as being made by the Emperor Constantine. But I want rather to stress its ritualistic value. The poem was probably composed in an age when the founding of the Church feasts in honor of the discovery of the true cross was fresh in the minds of devoted Christians. In the poem we find words recalling the Latin ritual, *sigebeam* recalling Latin *lignum triumphale*; or *ymbclypte* reminding us of the *amplecti* of the Latin hymns. Not only this but I suspect that the extraordinary regularity of the Old English heroic verse types in parts of this poem may be an attempt by the poet to give the monotonous rhythm of the liturgical chant. One more point may be noted, the fact that the lines of the poem are carved in the old native runic letters and this is not without significance.

So the verses associated with the Ruthwell Cross illustrate the intersection of pagan and Christian just as the Cross itself does: here moreover we have the old (the pagan) not rejected by, but being fulfilled in the new (the Christian).

## CHAPTER III

### THE EPIC *BEOWULF* AND ITS SETTING

#### THE OLDEST ENGLISH EPIC AND ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

I said in my first chapter that I did not propose to put the literary material in the forefront: this chapter is concerned first with the archaeology of the epic *Beowulf*. But for those of you who are not familiar with the poem I propose to introduce it in three ways: first by giving the story briefly; secondly by describing its make-up; thirdly, by relating it to the larger class of literature to which it belongs.

Beowulf is the name of the hero, the central figure of the poem, a prince of the Geatas who ruled in part of Sweden and whose capital was probably very near the modern city of Göteborg, Sweden. In the beginning of the poem, his uncle Hygelac (known to be a historical figure who died in the early sixth century) was king. Across the water in Denmark and also in south Sweden ruled an aged king called Hrothgar, over a number of tribes, the Danes or Scyldingas, people of Scyld or of the Shield. His palace was celebrated as Heorot and its site was not far from Copenhagen. Beowulf hears that Hrothgar's palace is being attacked by a mighty troll, so he sails over the sea with fourteen soldier comrades and offers help. He is received gladly, for the royal families know each other, and that night in the hall Beowulf wrestles with the monster who is called



Grendel, and tears off his arm before he can rush away to his lair. There is great rejoicing and all think trouble is at an end. But once more the hall is attacked, this time by a monstrous troll-wife and a famous hero of the Scyldingas is carried off as booty. Then Beowulf accompanied by members of both tribes penetrates the fen where the troll lair is said to be under a lake. He dives down under the water, fights and finally kills the troll-wife, finds Grendel's corpse, cuts off his head (which is so huge that four men can only carry it with difficulty) and makes his way in triumph back to the palace. Then laden with gifts from the grateful Hrothgar, he sails back home and tells the story of his triumph.

Years go by and the aged Beowulf now King of the Geatas finds a dragon is devastating his own kingdom. Wars with their neighbors the Swedes have already brought tragedy to Beowulf's people and a pall of gloom hangs over the poem. Once again Beowulf, now old, goes forth to fight, this time a national foe. His followers desert him except one young soldier who gives him help. The dragon is slain but Beowulf is killed in the fight. The poem ends as it begins with the account of the burial of a king. The first lines include the ship-burial of the ancestral hero of the Danish royal family, Scyld; the last lines describe the burning of Beowulf's body, the funeral rites and the making of a barrow on a headland to commemorate the hero.

### THE CULTURE OF *Beowulf*

The best way in my opinion to describe briefly the cultural make-up of *Beowulf* is to compare it with a church I visited in Rome called San Clemente which represented religious cultures of different periods. On

the ground floor is a church of the twelfth century in which, however, has been incorporated very striking monuments of the Byzantine period of six hundred years earlier. A church on a floor lower than this belongs to the fourth century and has well preserved frescoes. Below this and approached by some ancient Roman stairs we find ourselves in a house, possibly an oratory of San Clemente's, a friend of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, therefore dating back to the first century. Still below this has been excavated a chapel thought to be used for the worship of the Egyptian god, Mithras. If we now consider *Beowulf* in the same way, examining elements in its cultural background, we find first Christian elements, the latest material of the poem, for we remember that conversion to the Roman Church took place officially in 597. At an earlier stage would come the Heroic Age<sup>1</sup> material, the background of the poems and characteristic of all the Teutonic tribes. It is aristocratic socially and dates from A.D. 350 to 550—a time when the barbarians were destroying the Roman civilization of Western Europe. Belonging to probably an earlier date there is the folk material of the fairy-tale type, springing from the peasant class and exemplified in the fight with the monsters—a Jack-the-Giant-Killer type of story. Is there a cultural stage represented even earlier than this? Here scholars differ; but there are anomalies in the story not explained by literary tests, and which suggest that the poet did not fully understand the implications of his material. Such traits may, however, be explained as traces of a more primitive culture,<sup>2</sup> not recognized. These various elements are not,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. D. E. Martin-Clarke, *The Office of the Thyle in Beowulf*, *Review of English Studies* XII.



of course, in watertight compartments, but are welded together as a whole and preserved in literary form in an Anglo-Saxon MS. of the late tenth or early eleventh century.

### HEROIC POETRY

From a literary point of view *Beowulf* belongs to a very large class of literature, widespread in space and time, called "heroic." This has marked traits, because it is the result of certain conditions of development. It deals with wars, often of conquest, is produced by an aristocratic society whose center is the leader or hero. Certain social virtues are inculcated; courage and loyalty in the soldier, courage and generosity in the leader. Among the Teutons this literature is inter-tribal; they share their legends and their heroes. We notice that *Beowulf* himself is not Anglo-Saxon but Scandinavian, and the action of the story does not take place in England but in Denmark and Sweden. In addition to *Beowulf*, there are a number of shorter Anglo-Saxon poems<sup>2</sup> of heroic quality.

Let us next proceed with the examination of certain themes and motifs in *Beowulf* which are equally of literary and archaeological interest. And first I would mention the disposal of the dead whether by cremation or inhumation, but especially when a ship is used. Early in the poem, as we have noted, we find the remarkable and beautiful verses descriptive of the ship funeral of Scyld Seefing the ancestral hero of the great Danish dynasty, the Scyldingas. The poem closes in the land of the Geatas with the cremation of the hero for whose ashes a mound is to be prepared on a headland

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Gavin Bone, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Essay with specimen translations in verse.*



by the sea, for his perpetual and glorious memory. Throughout the poem too there are references to cremation, e. g. the burning of Hnæf and his young nephew on the funeral pyre after the disastrous fight between the Danes and the Frisians; the lament that Æschere (carried off by Grendel) will not now have his "meed of fire," and others. Unfamiliar yet impressive is this hero-burial in the native Anglo-Saxon verse.\*

In the roadstead rocked a ring-dight vessel,  
ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge:  
there laid they down their darling lord  
on the breast of the boat, the breaker-of-rings  
by the mast the mighty one. Many a treasure  
fetched from far was freighted with him.  
No ship have I known so nobly dight  
with weapons of war and weeds of battle,  
with breastplate and blade: on his bosom lay  
a heaped hoard that hence should go  
far o'er the flood with him floating away.  
No less these loaded the lordly gifts,  
thanes' huge treasure, than those had done  
who in former time forth had sent him  
sole on the seas, a suckling child.  
High o'er his head they hoist the standard,  
a gold-wove banner; let billows take him,  
gave him to ocean. Grave were their spirits,  
mournful their mood. No man is able  
to say in sooth, no son of the halls,  
no hero 'neath heaven,—who harbored that freight!

The description of Scyld's mysterious coming as a small child, his growth into a great and powerful King of the Danes, the picturesque details of his ship-burial and the passing of the ship into the deep are unfor-

\* Cp. Gummere, *The Oldest English Epic*, translated in the original metres, lines 32-32.

gettable. The legend of a mysterious birth links him with many a hero medieval and biblical: the story of his departure must also have been typical of many. Incongruously enough (for it was essentially a pagan idea) it was even used to describe the passing of the great Irish Saint, Columcille (Columba). It is, however, as a reflection of an actual funeral practice of the pagan Teutonic age that I want to consider this episode. Similar descriptions are found elsewhere in Teutonic literature for both historic and imaginary figures: moreover, the literary descriptions are supported by actual grave finds.

These have a definite character, the material expression of man's spiritual experiences, which become crystallized into funeral customs and rites. Students have been able to classify examples of ship ritual under different categories:

- (1) The dead laid in a boat launched out to sea (with the corpse either burnt or unburnt),
- (2) The dead laid in a boat buried under a mound (with the corpse either burnt or unburnt),
- (3) The dead laid in a mound without a ship though sometimes the grave itself is shaped like a ship.

It is the belief behind, which gives the variety in the burial. There seem to have been two beliefs current:

- (1) The spirit of the dead haunts the grave after death: no journey is taken, and the corpse is unburnt.
- (2) The spirit of the dead does not haunt the grave but takes a journey to the realm of spirits and the corpse is burnt.

A tenth-century account by one Ibn Fossilan fills out



by description what lies behind cremation. "'You Arabs,' said the Swedish Varangian, 'are surely a stupid people. You take the man who is the best beloved and highest in honor of you all and cast him down into the earth, where creeping things and worms will devour him. We, on the other hand, burn him in the twinkling of an eye, so that straightway and without delay he enters into Paradise.' Then he burst into a wild laugh, and added thus: 'The love which his lord (God) bears towards him is the cause that the wind blows already, and in the twinkling of an eye he takes him to himself.'"

But it is to be remembered that these are only general principles of belief and one finds obvious incongruity in the funeral rites. But we do know that the choice and arrangement of objects in the grave mound is not accidental but deliberate. And finally, details in literary descriptions are found to correspond with the burials and thereby assume a new significance. To the generally informed man ship-burial or burning is always associated with the Viking Age and rightly so, because not only do we know of some five hundred and fifty cases of ship-burial in that age but because the ship-burning rites performed for the young God Balder and described in the Prose Edda are the model for the age—such rites were given to rich and poor and obviously express the belief of the whole people. But many overlook the fact that they go back in date to the Merovingian Period of Scandinavia, when at Vendel (Uppland, Sweden) princes are buried in ships without cremation and with very rich funeral goods in the grave; the same is true of Valsgarde. Similarly richly furnished ship-graves are to be found in early Norwegian history: the best known are those at Oseberg and Gokstad in the



early Viking Age, both of which are magnificently preserved because buried in blue clay and peat. It is because these ships have been excellently reconstructed<sup>1</sup> and their contents and the arrangements of the burials recorded that we are able to appreciate much more fully details in literary accounts. And we may note here that the Sutton Hoo burial lies in time between the Merovingian ship-burials and those at Oseberg and Gokstad.

If we look now into the details of the first fifty-two lines of *Beowulf* we may make certain deductions:

- (1) The corpse of Scyld is borne to the ocean current where in the harbor the vessel awaits it. There is emphasis on the idea that the dead is prepared for a journey. Even when placed in mounds the funeral ships are generally turned seawards and are near the water. The oars of the Oseberg ship had previously been newly made for the funeral journey!
- (2) The body of Scyld was laid in the center of the ship by the mast, not put in a bed or sepulchral chamber as in the Oseberg burial. Scyld was exposed to the elements as was one corpse in a Vendel grave.
- (3) Scyld's thanes load the boat with much treasure: battle weapons, armor, blades and byrnies. On the hero's breast lay great treasure, tribal heirlooms. They placed over his head a golden standard.

But we must now note what is missing in the *Beowulf* account. Scyld's body is alone, unaccompanied by other human beings. In the Oseberg ship two women's bodies

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Oseberg Ship, Plate XVII.

were found; obviously a henchwoman had been sacrificed with her mistress. Balder's dead body was accompanied by his wife's on his ship-journey. Not even animals are mentioned as sacrificed for Scyld though it is a common characteristic even in a small ship-burial like that at Ladby in Denmark. Sacrifice is certainly one of the elements in the pagan ritual of ship-burial but it is clear that for a Christian audience such references would not be tolerated: and it is omitted in *Beowulf*. Mr Phillips, the Excavator at Sutton Hoo, told me that he found in the ship-grave there no sign of bones (human or animal) nor even of teeth.

#### ROYAL CEMETERIES

This ship-burial description is naturally to be compared with the ship-burial excavated in 1939 at Sutton Hoo and known to date within the seventh century. Two of the most significant features of the Sutton Hoo find are its extraordinary wealth and the fact that it belongs to a royal burial-ground. The value of the objects found\* associates it with other outstandingly valuable grave finds throughout the world and the ages; all of which are the graves of royalty. This archaeological evidence of devotion to royal families is well supported in Anglo-Saxon verse. Three royal dynasties are described in *Beowulf* with great respect and praise, while in the historic records of this early period we find special information about the genealogy of royal families, descending from pagan gods like Woden and Seaxneat, or from some great hero like Offa of Angeln. Is it much beside the point to note that we still have

\* Cp. Gordon Childs, *Progress and Archaeology*, chapter VI.



within the British Commonwealth a strong sense of respect for monarchy?

Here let me say a word more about the royal dynasty commemorated at Sutton Hoo, which I deal with in greater detail in chapter V. The ship-mound is only one of eleven to be seen in the neighborhood. Professor Chadwick<sup>1</sup> has referred to the archaeological and historical evidence available which points to its being the burial ground of an East Anglian royal family living in the late sixth, seventh, and early eighth centuries. Bede tells us certain things about this royal family, but he does not tell us, as does the Ynglingasaga, of the Swedish royal family, where the members were buried. But we do know that only four miles away lies Rendlesham, a residence of the East Anglian kings at this period.

Students of *Beowulf* will naturally think of the funeral mounds of the early Swedish kings at Old Uppsala. The three great mounds in a line near the church there, among the largest in Europe, are most impressive, and with the "Ottar Vendel-Crow" mound at Vendel, a few miles away, represent the grave mounds of generations of early kings. What about the Danish royal family, so important in *Beowulf*? Only recently an American scholar, Professor Herben,<sup>2</sup> seems to have discovered a site which is most probably the original site of Hrothgar's palace and of the Danish royal family. Here as at Sutton Hoo and Sweden interesting valuable objects have been uncovered in grave mounds, though many in the neighborhood have still to be excavated. Lastly, in 1938 I visited mounds near the Oslo fiord,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Antiquity* (March 1940), "Who is he?"

<sup>2</sup> Cp. *Publications Modern Language Association* (1935), pp. 933 ff.



Norway, which covered bodies of the early Norwegian dynasties. The most interesting, already referred to, is that of the Oseberg ship-burial, thought to be the grave of a queen of the Ynglings in Vestfold, grandmother of Harold the Fairhaired who unified the early kingdom of Norway.

I have seen some of the contents of the Swedish mounds preserved in Stockholm museum; and three of the objects are pictured at the end of this book. They were rich not only in metal (gold and silver), but also in artistic achievement of design and workmanship; indeed so rich, that they have given their name to artistic periods. The whole period is often known as the Vendel period and the decorative style recognized as the Vendel style. It seems then that Sweden and Denmark in the Merovingian Period, Norway in the Viking Age and Sutton Hoo, England, in the seventh century belong to this worldwide set of extraordinary royal burials. We can compare the tombs of the Pharaohs culminating in the Great Pyramid, and the Mycenaean shaft graves of the Mediterranean. It is, moreover, clear to the archaeologist that royal tombs of this extravagant type only occur at a certain transitional stage in social evolution, viz. when barbarian societies are suddenly irradiated from a much higher civilization. Gordon Childe exemplifying from Egyptian examples writes: "The tombs are symbolic of the political unification of Egypt and the creation of a civilized state out of a collection of barbarian communities, presumably organized on a kinship basis."

I shall deal in chapter V in some detail with the precious objects found at Sutton Hoo and this will give you an idea of the equal if not greater treasure hoards

found in Sweden which belong to an earlier period. Here at Sutton Hoo we find in England a site wealthy enough to justify the descriptions of lavish treasure characteristic of *Beowulf*. Hitherto there had always been discrepancy between the comparative poverty of the grave-finds and the rich descriptions of the poet. Where does such gold and silver come from in the countries of north Europe? If we go back to the Heroic Age to which the subject matter of the poems belongs, we realize it to be a period of disaster to Roman civilization which was looted and overrun by the barbarians. Some of this loot was kept in the form of money, some turned into massive gold objects for the use of the victors. Some however was buried in the ground, possibly for safety\* even as the modern Germans hid their bullion in caves, only to have it discovered by the advancing soldiers of the United Nations. But some of these Scandinavian hoards were meant to stay in the ground. Perhaps they were buried as a kind of offering. For in early records of the cult of the god Othin a dead man is said to take to Valhalla, the Paradise of warriors, what he had hidden in the earth as well as what he had placed in his grave with his body. Professor Gordon has suggested that a phrase in *Beowulf*, *galdre bewunden*, used of hidden treasure, may be suggestive here; it may indicate a spell laid on the treasure to protect it from being robbed because it is sacred to the gods. Be that as it may, the north was exceedingly wealthy and Eng-

\* Recently at Mildenhall, Suffolk, the plough turned up buried treasure, now in the British Museum, estimated as worth £50,000, hidden near a Roman villa, apparently from the advancing invaders. It is very like the Traprain Law treasure, now in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh and probably of the same period.



land apparently no exception; and the poet of *Beowulf* gives an account<sup>10</sup> of the treasure put in Beowulf's howe:<sup>11</sup>

The folk of the Weders fashioned there  
on the headland a barrow broad and high,  
by ocean-farers far descried:  
in ten days' time their toil had raised it,  
the battle-brave's beacon. Round brands of the pyre  
a wall they built, the worthiest ever  
that wit could prompt in their wisest men.  
They placed in the barrow that precious booty,  
the rounds and the rings they had reft erewhile,  
hardy heroes, from hoard in cave,—  
trusting the ground with treasure of earls,  
gold in the earth, where ever it lies  
useless to men as of yore it was.

Then about that barrow the battle-keen rode,  
atheling-born, a band of twelve,  
lament to make, to mourn their king,  
chant their dirge, and their chieftain honor.  
They praised his earlship, his acts of prowess  
worthily witnessed: and well it is  
that men their master-friend mightily laud,  
heartily love, when hence he goes  
from life in the body forlorn away.

#### VIEWS OF WELL-KNOWN SCHOLARS ABOUT DATE AND PROVENANCE OF *Beowulf*

Before considering the still wider relationships of *Beowulf* at this period it is necessary briefly to indicate its date, provenance, authorship and general tone, whether pagan or Christian. A trio<sup>12</sup> of celebrated Eng-

<sup>10</sup> Cp. *Beowulf*, lines 3156-3177.

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Plate II, Gunnar's howe in Iceland. He was a well-known hero of the Viking Age.

<sup>12</sup> Cp. R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction* (1932), pp. 389 ff. The three scholars are R. W. Chambers, Fr. Klaeber, and W. W. Lawrence.



lish and American scholars agreed independently to date the written poem substantially as we have it, extant in a tenth- or eleventh-century MS., within the years 650-781,<sup>12</sup> the individual scholars emphasizing an earlier or later date within this period. They all three attribute the epic to a single author, a Christian, unknown, but probably a cleric; at the same time he must have been an Anglian poet working upon the earlier lays. They affirm that the Christian elements are integral to it, i. e. not added after the main composition had been carried out. One of them, an American, thinks that these Christian elements may well come from Anglo-Saxon religious poetry rather than from the Scriptures direct. All three agree that the original written version of the poem was in a non-West-Saxon dialect, i. e. localized in the district drained by rivers falling into the Humber.

With all these views, except that of the dialect of the original MS., Professor H. M. Chadwick disagreed as early as 1912 in his famous book, *The Heroic Age: in the Growth of Literature*,<sup>13</sup> written with his wife twenty years later, he elaborates and emphasizes his position. The date of the written MS. of the Beowulf is settled, but he stresses this early epic as the result of "minstrel" poetry. He would ascribe it not to one author unknown, but rather to the original author, also unknown, who gave form to the theme of the poem

<sup>12</sup> Chambers dates the poem within the period of Bede: the year 731 is the date of the production of the Ecclesiastical History of the English People. At least one scholar would date the poem two hundred years later. He stresses its Christian quality, which he considers could not have been produced in a seventh-century England, so recently given over to paganism.

<sup>13</sup> Cp. *The Growth of Literature*, three vols. (1932-40) in collaboration with N. Kershaw Chadwick.

as we have it. Such an analysis allows for additions over a period of time by minstrel poets without irregularity in text or metre. He gives evidence to show it is unlikely that a written *Beowulf* would be in existence in the eighth century, but implies that a poem even of epic form, handed down by minstrel tradition, might well be earlier. Lastly, he has not changed his views about the Christian elements in the poem, affirming that these are additions made from time to time and that *Beowulf* as a whole conforms to the old (i.e. to the pagan heroic) rather than possesses the stamp of the new (the Christian).

I give thus, though briefly, the divergent views about the epic's provenance because they indicate how different the English cultural background could be in the seventh and eighth centuries: the one which we might call the orthodox, the England of the monastery and the scribal schools writing down the books of the day, their faces turned with admiration to the classical culture of the Mediterranean; the other the England of the barbarian north, with its Court bard, and verse handed down by oral tradition, and with its affections deeply engaged in the old pagan belief in *Wyrd* (fate) and *dom* (reputation).<sup>18</sup> And this England was marvelously creative, in the learned language of the day (Latin), in the native verse, as well as in sculpture and craftsmanship.

Yet one other element is present in the English monuments, for they all show marked interest in and similarity to Scandinavian story and art, especially to Sweden of an earlier age. Moreover, both the *Beowulf*

<sup>18</sup> Cp. the frequent use of these two words in heroic poetry. Belief in *Wyrd* is by no means dead in Britain.





verse and the Sutton Hoo objects show special connexion with one site in Sweden, viz. Vendel in Uppland. *Beowulf* includes an Anglo-Saxon version of the Scandinavian story of King Óttarr,<sup>18</sup> to whom was given the name of Vendel-Crow. Archaeological scholarship has now ascertained that this Vendel is the Swedish Vendel, lying some twenty miles north of Old Uppsala, and that Óttarr was buried there. We may note, too, that until recently students have been obliged to go to objects from the Vendel mounds in order to understand details of the armor described by the *Beowulf* poet. It is therefore arresting to find that a number of features in the armor found at Sutton Hoo also show close similarity with Vendel in Sweden, and so connexion with *Beowulf*.

#### WIDER CULTURAL CONTACTS

We now approach wider contacts.<sup>19</sup> First of all there are the connexions between the early European Kingdoms in the north, specially between the English and the Scandinavians. In the light of the Sutton Hoo find, questions dealing with such matters may need re-expression, elaboration and possibly re-orientation. From the point of view of the student of Old English poetry, we ask is there anything further and more specific to say about the Scandinavian connexions with Old English heroic poetry and especially with the epic *Beowulf*? To elaborate: "How have the legends of Scandinavian royal families forming the background of *Beowulf* come into the hands of an Anglo-Saxon poet of the non-West-Saxon area? Were they brought over

<sup>18</sup> In *Beowulf* he is called Ohthere, but the story is attached to his father.



in the memories of the Anglo-Saxons from their continental home as part of the common Teutonic tradition and worked up into *Beowulf*? And were they therefore brought from Scandinavia to the European homes of these tribes, before migration? Or did they travel directly across the sea to England brought by sailors and merchants at a later time than the migration? Why is it that objects described in *Beowulf* are so like those found in Scandinavian graves and especially those at Vendel (Uppland)?<sup>17</sup>

The archaeologist would at least ask: "what is the connexion between Sutton Hoo and Scandinavia? Were the objects in the ship-grave mostly made in England? Or were they imported from Scandinavia as well as from Europe? What is the special connexion between Sutton Hoo and Vendel (Uppland) that several objects in both are so much alike? Finally is there direct connexion between Sutton Hoo and *Beowulf*? And why are they both, belonging as they do to approximately the same period of production and locality, associated so closely with a special district in Sweden, viz. Vendel (Uppland)? Leading American, British, German and Scandinavian literary and linguistic scholars have expressed views on these topics using both detailed linguistic evidence, literary sources and the general tone of *Beowulf* to support their views. Professor Chadwick in his recent *Growth of Literature* reiterates that "from the appearance of the proper names in *Beowulf* it is clear that stories in the poem were not borrowed from northern sources (nor vice versa) in late times." These names

<sup>17</sup> In his lecture on the Sutton Hoo shield, *Antiquity* (March 1946), H. Maryon seems to have cut the Gordian knot. Readers, however, should consult his article both for its detailed description and also for pictures of skilful reconstruction.

are preserved in tradition independently in the two countries.<sup>18</sup> Chambers gives similar views for himself and for Klaeber and W. W. Lawrence; so that we may say that the generally held view of scholars is that the Scandinavian material in *Beowulf* was brought across the seas by settlers in the sixth century and assimilated in England.

One well-known scholar, Knut Stjerna,<sup>19</sup> approaching the matter from the archaeological viewpoint, differs from this and no one working on the same subject can help being heavily in his debt. His editor, Clark Hall, sums up Stjerna's work on *Beowulf* as showing "how comparatively little of the *mise-en-scène* must be due to the English author." Stjerna himself writes that the "Geats raised a second monument to the memory of their saga-renowned king, in the shape of a poem" (that poem was the source of *Beowulf*).

The answers to such big questions at the moment must be in abeyance while detailed archaeological work is being done on the objects from the ship-burial. Meanwhile we can give, very briefly, the general deductions<sup>20</sup> of Dr Kendrick from a survey of certain objects before they were packed away in safety from the expected London blitz. Until the Sutton Hoo dig no archaeologist would have expected, outside the area of East Kent, such examples of gold cloisonné jewelry. Whether these are due to the workmanship of goldsmiths from Kent or independently were made by East Anglian craftsmen, the objects do not make clear. Certain characteristics (drawn attention to in chapter V) are

<sup>18</sup> Cp. R. W. Chambers, *op. cit.*, pp. 300 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Cp. *Essays on Beowulf*, translated and edited by J. R. Clark Hall.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. T. D. Kendrick, Sutton Hoo and Saxon Archaeology, *British Museum Quarterly* XIII.



not found in Kentish work and yet the Sutton Hoo jeweler does use striking devices used by the Jutes ("men of Kent") too. So Dr Kendrick suggests that perhaps as skill in Kent waned so skill in East Anglia grew (in the same way as the political overlordship of Ethelbert of Kent was superseded by that of Redwald of East Anglia). Moreover, the new school owed much to the Merovingian fashions of the Franks and some most noteworthy designs to the Upper Rhine. But most important for the student of Anglo-Saxon literature, the armor of the warrior also shows marked connexions with Vendel and Valsgärde, in Sweden. So Dr Kendrick sums up by stressing the fact that Sutton Hoo has revealed new fashions in pagan Saxon art and he calls the period "the golden Age of East Anglia, an archaeological glory illuminating and confirming the historical fact of a dawning political supremacy." Finally he refers to the silver objects in the grave. They are not home-made but clearly of Byzantine origin, but they do throw light on the "range of possessions of a wealthy English king."

But these rich funeral sites need also to be seen, as we have said already, against a background of similar world-wide funeral ceremony. For at different periods in the history of the world, extravagantly rich royal graves have been found: and auxiliary questions relevant to *Beowulf* will arise in connexion with the characteristic society of such kingdoms, their political development, their trade, their art and culture generally.

It seems clear then that the work of the moment is with the archaeologists, and that the student of language and comparative literature must wait on their findings before being able to take up further questions



of provenance and culture in connexion with *Beowulf*. Finally, to return once again to the question of the connexion between the poem and Sutton Hoo, — a fuller consideration of this, too, must await the final detailed deductions of the archaeologists. Two or three reflections may be made here. First, there seems to be no epigraphical material present on the objects to associate them with a special personage or locality, though there may be such material in the seven funeral mounds still to be excavated in the vicinity. Secondly, as we have noted, Professor Chadwick, from the historical point of view, would date the burial not later than A. D. 640 and associate it with Redwald of East Anglia. Thirdly, so far the forty gold coins have not given a specific date to the burial.<sup>21</sup> Finally, it is of remarkable interest that scholars from literary and linguistic evidence do ascribe *Beowulf* to a non-West-Saxon area and allocate its production to a period of time not later than the middle of the eighth century and probably as early as, if not earlier than, the middle of the seventh century.

<sup>21</sup> Since these lectures were delivered a coin has been identified among these forty which belongs to the reign of the Merovingian King Dagobert. Although views as to the dates of this king differ, the identification would seem to indicate that the burial was too late to be that of Redwald, the Bretwalda.

## CHAPTER IV

### TECHNICALITIES: ARCHAEOLOGICAL, LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC

The close connexion between the literary, linguistic and archaeological aspects of *Beowulf* in larger matters may be paralleled when we come to look at detail. For much of such detail the man and woman in the street has no time and it is therefore for the specialist student that this chapter is compiled—here again the pictures at the end of the book should be given constant and special attention: for descriptions by the poet can be amplified till a poem like *Beowulf* becomes a picture. We begin to use eyes as well as ears, and more than that. Just as Wagner by staging the story of the greatest northern hero, Siegfried, has made us all realize it more fully, so, if I may say so, archaeological knowledge can stage *Beowulf*. The characters of Hygelac, Ingeld and Hrothgar do not remain as a student once described them "mere phonetic hiccups," but come to life in their gold-bedecked halls. Historic characters they may not have been: imaginary ones are sometimes more potent. I might go a step further. Again and again the archaeologist is helped by the poet himself, such appears to be the delight he takes in giving us details about the stage properties of his characters. See how he enjoys describing the old sword found by Beowulf under the waters of the haunted mere: *enta ærgeweorc* (the ancient handiwork of the giants) as he calls it. I feel myself (without exaggeration), that sometimes such objects

become alive,<sup>1</sup> even as the minstrel said, in the Finnish poem of the Kalewala, that his bows and arrows do:—

I have bows in great abundance  
Bows on every nail and rafter  
Bows that laugh at all the hunters  
Bows that go themselves a-hunting.

This sort of statement must of course be clearly separated from the deductions made by the archaeologist. He digs, observes, classifies, deduces and it is primarily with his deductions that we are concerned.

I make no apology for beginning with the warrior's accoutrements, as he is the central figure of this Heroic Verse. By referring once again to the pictures of the reconstructed Teutonic warrior, the Franks Casket, and the Öland plates we can select the important factors in Teutonic armor. For defence, coat of mail, shield and helmet: for attack, spear, sword, knife (*seax*) and sometimes bow and arrows. There is a panel of the Franks Casket depicting Egil, the Archer; and we find references in *Beowulf* to the use of the bow.<sup>2</sup> In the *Battle of Maldon* bows and arrows were used, but such are rarely found in the graves. Bows of course would generally disappear as they were made of wood.

References in *Beowulf* give us the same information about the general equipment of a warrior.<sup>3</sup> We are told the warriors who slept in the hall Heorot before the coming of Grendel's mother placed their shields at their heads, and over their sleeping benches their lofty helmets, chainmail corselets and mighty war shafts. It

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the common habit of giving a pet name to a motor car to-day; and the many symbols painted on the vehicles of the British and American forces during the war.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. *Beowulf* l. 2437 *horn-boga*, and l. 1433 *flan-boga*.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. *Beowulf* ll. 1232 ff. and 1441 ff.



was their custom to be always prepared. On the other hand, a detailed account of a chieftain's outfit includes not only the above but the very important weapon, the sword. This was the weapon that was used by Byrhtnoth, the leader at Maldon, in the tenth century, to defend himself.

#### ARMOR: THE CORSELET

Two of these pieces of armor are exceedingly rare not only in Anglo-Saxon graves but in Teutonic burials, elsewhere in Europe, viz. the corselet and the helmet; but they are frequently mentioned in Old English heroic verse. Beowulf's own mail-shirt was said to be made by Weland, the super-smith of the north, and he told Hrothgar when about to risk his life that if he is killed his "best of battle dresses" inherited from his grandfather, is to be given to his kinsman and lord.\* In at least one other poem<sup>†</sup> we are told the corselet in use is an heirloom and it may be suggested that this is one of the reasons for scarcity in the graves.

From the epithets used in *Beowulf* we can infer some were specially made to protect the upper part of the body (*breost-net*), and some were clearly made of intertwined iron rings (*hond-locen*, *hondum gebroden*). Stjerna has illustrated the way such rings are linked in Scandinavian corselets. In the Copenhagen Museum shirts-of-mail of the very early Heroic Age were made of as many as twenty-thousand rings. In England, there was some chain work found at Benty Grange, Derbyshire, but it is not certain that they belonged to a corselet.

\* Cp. *Beowulf* l. 455.

† Cp. *Waldere* l. 18.

It is clear from Mr Phillips's excellent chart<sup>4</sup> of the contents of the Sutton Hoo burial that there were two heaps of chain rings in the grave, one belonging to a cauldron for hanging and the other, found under the small silver dish and near the axe, to a warrior's shirt-of-mail. The latter I examined myself though it has not yet been treated by the British Museum laboratory experts. In its present condition, one is not able to make deductions about the size or forging of the links though the Anglo-Saxon poet has epithets which might cast light on these. In another poem we are told *Waldere's* corselet is handed down from *Ælfhere*, magnificent, adorned with gold and *geapneb*.<sup>5</sup>

Let us next see how the artist has depicted this kind of armor. On the *Franks Casket*<sup>6</sup> of the seventh century, there seems to be a definite technique for representing chain-mail and it shows clearly that sometimes the whole man is clad in it, and sometimes only part of him. But it is quite clear that some of these fighters are not clad in mail at all. They seem to wear the characteristic tunic with sleeves, a tunic that may be compared with the male garment in the picture of the *Halberstadt Diptych*. Warriors clad in tunics are clearest in the left section of the pictures, for other figures are wrapped in the characteristic mantle. In Swedish graves of the sixth and following centuries at Vendel, Uppland, where armor excavated coincides in descrip-

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Plate XXI.

<sup>5</sup> Cp. *Waldere* l. 19. I take *geap* to mean shaped like two hands placed together to hold water. It is used of many different objects, a ship, a roof, a gem in its setting, etc. Its meaning may be indicated thus, either U or N i.e. upwards of a ship and downwards of a roof. Cp. Old Norse *gaupa*. Should the MS. have read *web*? This corselet is also described as *ærofað* (cunningly decorated).

<sup>6</sup> Cp. Plate X.



tion with *Beowulf* in an impressive way, the helmets are often decorated with thin metal plates on which warriors are depicted in warharness.<sup>9</sup> The treatment of the mail-shirt of some of these figures recalls that on the Franks Casket, allowing for the fact that one is in metal, the other in ivory. But it is also clear that some of these armed figures are clad in a different kind of tunic which has decorated<sup>10</sup> (or reinforced) shoulder pieces and borders and are not in chain-mail. We can see from the picture of one of the four well-known bronze plates from Torslunda, Öland (Sweden)<sup>11</sup> armed warriors in similar equipment; while other bronze plates show the hero, in a garb treated in the same way as the artist has depicted animal skins, on the same plates. And we should remember that in Old Norse verse we are told that the warriors, berserkers, are called wolf-coats,<sup>12</sup> and wear the skins of wild beasts. One Anglo-Saxon poet sings: "But here they are bearing their gear forwards, arrows are whistling, the greycoat-of-mail clanks, the buckler resounds; shield echoes back the clash of the spear," . . .<sup>13</sup> and I have taken "greycoat" to be coat-of-mail parallel with the two other epithets, though it may also be, as in the *Battle of Brunanburh*, "that grey beast, the wolf in the forest," who is part of the traditional group of beasts waiting for the slaughtered in the battle.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. later notes on the Sutton Hoo clasps. Chapter V below.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. later notes on the Sutton Hoo clasps, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Plate IX.

<sup>12</sup> Cp. the bard of Harold Fairhaired, a contemporary of King Alfred who wrote: "wolfcoats are they called who bear bloody shields in battle."

<sup>13</sup> Cp. the poem fragment *Finn* ll. 5 and 6:

*Ac her forth berath, fugelas singath,  
gyllleth grayhama, guthwudu hlynneth,  
weyd scefte oncwyrth.*



## THE HELMET

We may quote here also a few lines from *Beowulf* which are word pictures corresponding in a remarkable way to these engraved plates. In translation<sup>14</sup> they run: "Above their cheek-guards shone boar-images gilded, shining and tempered — the savage boar kept watch over the fierce hearted." Whether with a boar-crest or no, like the chain-mail the helmet is rarely found in the graves: but also like the chain-mail it is referred to several times in Anglo-Saxon verse. Moreover, apart from incidental allusion, we have a detailed description of the hero's own helmet which shows how very costly and beautifully made such helmets can be.

But the shining helmet protected his head . . . adorned with gold, encircled with regal metal bands as in the days of old it had been made by the weapon-smith, decorated marvellously and set round with figures of boars so that after, no sword or battle-blade could ever cut through it.<sup>15</sup>

The "regal metal bands" mentioned here are clearly endorsed in the composition of the Swedish helmets which as already mentioned have thin metal plates rivetted to them for decoration. "Blade has to come

<sup>14</sup> Cp. *Beowulf* ll. 303 ff.:

*Eoforlic ættonen*  
*ofer hleorber(g)an gehroden golde,*  
*fah and fyrheard,—ferhwearde heold*  
*guthmod grimmon.*

and the picture of the Otland plates.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. *Beowulf* ll. 1448 ff.:

*ac se hwita helm hafelan wereðe,*  
*since gweorthað,*  
*beþongen freawearum, æc hine fyrðadugum*  
*worhte weapna smið, wundrum teode,*  
*bezetle swinlicum, thæt hine sythðan no*  
*broad ne beadomecas bitan ne menhton.*

up against helmet in the battle," says an Anglo-Saxon proverb.<sup>14</sup> Proverbial remarks are essentially practical and just as the technical term *rand*<sup>15</sup> is defined exactly in proverbial lore, so probably here we may have a reference to a special part of the helmet also which resists the sword cut,<sup>16</sup> viz. "the rib strengthened with metal strips and called *wala*, which guards the hero's head above so that no sword . . . can injure it severely." This is well represented in the picture of a reconstructed helmet from Vendel.

Here too archaeology supports literature and we may compare not only the Öland metal plates, but the helmet framework found at Benty Grange, Derbyshire, where a nose-piece is evident. The fragments of the Sutton Hoo helmet are not yet on view at present writing and we must wait to see how far Anglo-Saxon poetic details hitherto explained by early Swedish finds will be confirmed by the Sutton Hoo objects of seventh-century England. The preliminary report says: "it had been smashed: the headpiece was of iron: there were two applied ridge pieces of bronze passing over the crown . . . and from ear to ear. It had certain decoration especially a cast bronze face-piece. From the presence of gold the helmet may have been gilt."<sup>17</sup>

### THE SHIELD

The Teutonic shield was usually a circular wooden disc with a hole in the centre covered by a hollow

<sup>14</sup> Cp. *Cotton Gnostic Verses* I. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. *Rand* is that which protects the fingers and so is recognised as the boss of a shield.

<sup>16</sup> Cp. *Beowulf* II. 1030 ff. and Plate XV.

<sup>17</sup> *The Antiquaries Journal* XX (1940). A reconstruction of the helmet may now (1946) be seen in the British Museum.

metal boss with a handlebar across it and riveted to it by means of tiny rivets. From grave finds the shape of the Anglo-Saxon boss seems to have been standardized: the wooden part would naturally disappear in the graves. The names given in Anglo-Saxon verse show clearly various characteristics of the shield, viz. *bord-wudu* (wooden shield); *lind* (made of limewood); *rand*, (the boss) etc. We know the wooden disc was very thin, for rivets riveting the boss onto it are about  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch thick, no thicker than the Kingston Brooch: its utility in defence, therefore, must have been largely due to skill in manipulation. It was no "Maginot line" defence. We are told in the *Njall Saga*, Chapter XLI, that the hero Gunnarr, when attacked, gave the shield such a twist that the spearhead broke off short at the socket. It is the thinness of the Anglo-Saxon warboard which best explains a fight in the battle of Maldon between the leader Byrhtnoth and a Norse pirate. The verse runs in translation:—<sup>20</sup>

Then he shoved with his shield (when the spear stuck in him piercing his thin warboard), so that the wooden shaft snapped asunder, and he shivered the spear-point so that it sprang back and out,

i. e. the viking spear-point penetrated Byrhtnoth's wooden shield because he was not quite deft enough to prevent it and so he was wounded. Partly in anger at this, and partly in pain he shoved the shield so furiously that he dashed the broken shaft and spear-point out of the wound.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. *Maldon* ll. 126 and 137:

*He sceaf tha mid tham scylda that se sceaf to berst  
And thaet spere sprengeð, thaet hit sprang ongean.*



Examination of one of the plates on a Vendel helmet,<sup>21</sup> grave No. 14, shows a shield pierced through by the spear point and the shaft buckling up in the process. The artist has put in a second buckled up spear-shaft through the corselet perhaps to complete the design.

From lack of reference to specially fine shields in the first part of *Beowulf* it seems that the hero carried the normal Teutonic warboard. When fighting against the dragon, however, he had one made of iron to withstand the flames of the monster. But we know from a Swedish example and now from Sutton Hoo,<sup>22</sup> that the shield can be as magnificent an object as the helmet or the sword. We shall no longer have to refer to that found in grave No. 11 at Vendel (Uppland)<sup>23</sup> to appreciate its possibilities. But the shield does not kindle the imagination of the poet in *Beowulf* as do the helmet and sword: for full poetic treatment of the "heroic" shield we have to go to the Mediterranean, to Homer.

### THE SPEAR

We next come to the weapons of attack: spear, knife and sword. The spear like the shield is made of wood and iron, the wood rotting away in the graves but the original length of the wooden shaft being known by the position of the spear point at the corpse's head, and the ferrule at its feet. The spear was the main weapon of the warrior and was used for close fighting and hurling, according to the size of the spear point and shaft. Descriptions in Old English verse sometimes refer to one and sometimes to the other kind. The hero

<sup>21</sup> Cp. the picture of the helmet in *Beowulf*, ed. Fr. Klaeber, figure 5.

<sup>22</sup> Cp. *Antiquity* (March 1946).

<sup>23</sup> Stjerna, *Essays on Beowulf* (1912), figure 23.

Beowulf once used barbed spear-heads when attacking a monster in the haunted mere.

### THE SEAX (OR KNIFE) AND THE SWORD

The knife is a very important weapon and a very old one, older than the sword. Its medieval and modern counterpart are the dirk and cutlass. It was worn in the belt, and carried often by women as well as by men. The Anglo-Saxon name for it was *seax* (the archaeologists call it *scramaseax*), and it has been suggested that like the Indian Goorka's *kukri* it was the Saxon indigenous weapon, originally made of stone. It is of course much smaller than the sword, single edged and thickened on the blunt-edged side. It was very much pointed and with a small handle. It was made for stabbing. There is an interesting change over between *seax* and sword in the fighting that takes place in *Beowulf*. There is no doubt that the affections of the poet lie with the sword; and yet it is not the sword<sup>24</sup> of Beowulf that finally kills the dragon! But it is the sword which is the hero's weapon and it was this weapon that irradiated all the glamor of chivalry round it in the Middle Ages. There is no less warmth of feeling when the Beowulf poet deals with "Hrunting" or the giant sword under the mere or with "Nægling." True, there are two kinds of swords in the literature of the Anglo-Saxon Period. The ordinary sword, about thirty-six inches long, was double-edged, not very pointed, with one guard, and, in later Anglo-Saxon times, a cocked hat pommel. But in *Beowulf* and other early Old English verse there are extraordinary swords mentioned.

<sup>24</sup> Cp. D. E. Martin-Clarke, Office of Thyle in *Beowulf*, *Review English Studies* XIII.



The characteristics attributed to these are not peculiar to Anglo-Saxon poetry but are very striking. They are almost all of them named. Sigurthr's sword was called Gram; Waldhere's Mimming. Similar named swords are found in the Sagas: Grettir's was called Jökulsnaut. They are heirlooms and their origin is mysterious. "Mimming" was said to have been made by Weland.

They are very large and strong. We recall how in the German Siegfried legend only Siegfried himself could forge a sword (out of the sherds of his father's) which would be strong enough for him. Often and again it was said of such blades that they did not fail heroes in the battle. The Anglo-Saxons were famed for their smiths' work and a sword blade rightly forged was a great treasure.<sup>25</sup> But the blades of these special swords had all been damascened, i. e. they had been treated in such a way as to have a wavy pattern on the blade. Such blades are very common in the Denmark finds of the Migration Period, but not a single one has been found in the United Kingdom. These early examples were made by the Romans and have the Roman stamp on them. If the process were not really understood in the North, it was understandable that they should be thought to be forged by giants or dwarfs. It is with reference to these blades that the poet uses the terms *wyrmfah*,<sup>26</sup> (decorated with serpentine shapes); *atertanumfah*, (decorated with twig-like patterns), from the use of acid on the blade; and *wæg sword*,<sup>27</sup> (wavy

<sup>25</sup> If a sword were not well forged it might bend up in the middle of a fight, as we are told did happen in the Saga. Heroes had to stop fighting and bend swords straight again before they could continue.

<sup>26</sup> Cp. *Wyrmlicum fah* (a serpentine form engraved on stone), *The Wanderer* l. 98.

<sup>27</sup> Cp. Old Norse *wægir* and Old English *brogdenmað*.



sword). Cassiodorus the historian gives an excellent description of such blades when his master Theodoric King of the Goths received a gift of swords.

So sharp (said he) that they will cut other weapons: so bright that they reflect with a sort of iron light the face of the beholder . . . so evenly and keenly are the edges forged that they do not seem made by the file but by fire: between them are inserted hollows and beautiful grooves which appear like snakes. These make such varied shadows (light and shade) that you believe the shining metal to be inlaid with different colors.

The picture of the sword from Sweden<sup>22</sup> (Ultuna, Uppland) coincides closely with the descriptions in *Beowulf*. Notice that it has two straight guards which show interlaced work and an elaborately inlaid pommel. Such words as *maththum sweord* (treasure sword), *geatolic* (splendid), *wraetlic* (curiously made), *wreoth-enhilt* (hilt inlaid with interlace pattern), *golde gegyrede* and *gylden hilt* would all be illustrated by this sword. I shall deal with other technical but more ambiguous terms later in this chapter.

What about the sword of Sutton Hoo? Its length is 2 feet 9½ inches, it has two guards and a characteristically shaped pommel cap, beautifully decorated with cloisonné work, garnet and gold. The rivets are ornamented with beaded gold wire; all the workmanship is good. The grip of this sword has some thin plates of gold filigree attached to it, with linked spiral pattern and herring-bone work. The scabbard in which the blade is exhibited has applied to it side by side near the top two exquisitely made gold buttons in garnet cloisonné,<sup>23</sup> while it is clear that two elegantly designed

<sup>22</sup> Cp. Plate XVI.

<sup>23</sup> Cp. Plate IX, the scabbard of the sword of the warrior on left side. These details kindly supplied by British Museum as sword was not on exhibition.

flat-topped pyramidal gold mounts with slotted bases were attached originally to the sword knot. Round the chape of the scabbard was wrapped some cloth.

I find on enquiry that the blade is not damascened, nor is there any sign of a "ring in the hilt." I must make brief mention of such swords, called by the Anglo-Saxon poet *hring-mæl* and *fetel-hilt*, and described by the Norse poets as "*hringr er i hjalti*" (ring is in the hilt).<sup>50</sup> There are two types of such swords, and as they can be dated they are important when they have literary connexion: one type has a loose ring attached to a fixed one on the pommel; the other has the loose ring filled up and appearing as a bulge on the pommel. There are a number extant, but four with the loose ring have been found in England only, all in Kent. Vendel (Sweden) gives us examples of the fixed ring type, which is reckoned typologically later in date. On the Öland plates the craftsman shows the filled-in ring-sword. The epithet in *Beowulf* makes clear that the poet knew this type of weapon, and it was therefore with the greatest interest that I learnt from Mr Bruce Mitford, of the British Museum, that although the above sword had no sign of a ring there was found in the grave a ring "cast solid in one piece with its pin." This was apparently detached from a second sword of which there was no trace in the grave. The filled-in ring was just an independent fragment.

<sup>50</sup> Cp. Stjerna, *op. cit.*, who states that such belong to a group of twenty swords found in various European countries. The oldest, without the ring, are fifth century. In the seventh century a small loose ring appears on English examples. This becomes fixed by the end of the sixth century and increases in size. Their date covers 550-650 A.D.



## THE HONE

At Sutton Hoo another object is especially associated with the weapons, the Hone or Whetstone. I have not come across one before in a grave but they are not apparently uncommon. However, none of them are longer than a foot and very little stouter than half an inch. But this Whetstone is the length of an average sized woman's arm and of corresponding weight. Moreover it has unique decoration. Its ends are painted red and as you see from the picture are carved into a rounded shape enclosed in bronze clasps, which in their turn support two shallow bowls of bronze. One of these is missing. Next to these on each of the four sides, top and bottom, is carved a human bearded head. Its size and ornament suggest that it may have ceremonial significance.<sup>21</sup>

## THE ROYAL STANDARD

To approach the subject of this section from a different angle, there are certain descriptions, in *Beowulf*, of one object which might well find a counterpart in Anglo-Saxon grave finds; but until the Sutton Hoo dig, I have not heard mention of it except from references in literature. I refer to the object called by the archaeologists, flambeau or lamp-stand. I quote the description given in *Antiquity*:<sup>22</sup>

Immediately at the foot of the inner side of the chamber wall lay a long iron object in the form of a bar with its lower end pointed like a railing spike. The top end carried an equal-armed cross at

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<sup>21</sup> Cp. Plate XXV.

<sup>22</sup> Cp. Plate XXVIII and *Antiquity* (March 1940), p. 14. The *Antiquaries Journal* XX, p. 195 and *British Museum Quarterly* XIII, p. 113.



right angles to the bar, each of the four ends of the cross having a decoration in the form of the head and horns of a bull(?). Eleven inches from this feature the bar passed through a square iron frame, also at right angles to it. The four corners of this were decorated with more bulls' heads, and the frame was filled in with a system of iron bars parallel to its edges on all four sides. Signs were not wanting that the frame had been supported by stays which passed from the under sides of the corners down to the bar some 1 ft. 3 in. below; but this part of the object was badly preserved.

I now learn that the British Museum laboratory would place on the top of this object a bronze stag figure<sup>22</sup> on an iron ring, put originally with the unclassified finds.

I venture to suggest that this object may be all that is left of the royal banner (Old English *segn*). Four times is such an object mentioned in *Beowulf*.<sup>23</sup> In particular we note there was a banner in Scyld's funeral ship: "High over his head they hoisted his standard, a banner all of gold." Beowulf was given "a decorated hilted banner"<sup>24</sup> as a gift (mentioned twice), and Hygelac is said to have protected himself under such a one. Describing the treasures of the dragon-hoard (which was in a mound) the poet writes:—

His glance too fell on a gold-wove banner  
high o'er the hoard, of handiwork noblest,

<sup>22</sup> When examining this object for the first time in 1945, I suggested to Mr Bruce Metford of the British Museum that through supporting literary evidence I judged it was not a "flambeau" but a "royal standard." I was then given the above information and was told that an object in the Illustrated London News (July 21, 1945) was very similar to this. I am dealing with the standard in greater detail in the forthcoming volume in honor of Professor H. M. Chadwick.

<sup>23</sup> Cp. *Beowulf* ll. 47 ff., l. 1022 and l. 2132, l. 2938 and l. 2767 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Line 1022 reads in MS. *hroden hilde cumber*: there seems to be no need now for emendation to *hilde*.

brilliantly broidered: so bright its gleam,  
all the earth-floor he easily saw  
and viewed all these vessels.<sup>36</sup>

We know how in battle and on other occasions a banner is a special sign of royalty.<sup>37</sup> The fact that the bar of this object was pointed indicates that it could be erected whenever needed. The material if there were any would, of course, have decayed and disappeared, but we may note here that in one reference in *Beowulf* we have the phrase *eafor heafodsegn* (boar-head banner). The heads on the Sutton Hoo object seem to have horns and the boar was a divine symbol which we know was used on helmets. Moreover we know that different animals are used as symbols on early banners. We may recall the Scandinavian "raven banner" described in the Anglo-Saxon history of the Norse invasion. It is with all these points in mind that I have called this section, The Royal Standard.

### TEXTUAL

I shall next deal with textual obscurities and seek to show how by concentrating literary, linguistic and archaeological material on the problems we are more likely to get a solution.

36

*Suylea he siomian geseah segn eallgylden  
heah ofer hord, hondwundra mearc,  
geloern leothocraftum; of tham leoma stod,  
that he thone grundwong onyitan mearhte,  
wrote giendrelitan.*

*Beowulf* ll. 2707 ff.

The translation of *geloern*, *leothocraftum* may or may not be misleading, as the epithet in Old English is often used for metal work, especially for the corselet. In the Viking Age certainly the banners were often woven by women: but this is not the only possible form of emblem.

<sup>37</sup> Cp. *Exodus* I. 123; *Exodus* II. 342 and 175 and *Judith* I. 333.



First, there is a sentence in *Beowulf*, l. 404, "*thæt he on heotho stod*." The context indicates that Beowulf and his band of warriors enter Hrothgar's hall till he (Beowulf) stood on "something." What does *heotho* mean? It apparently only occurs in one other place<sup>28</sup> in Old English verse and there too the meaning is ambiguous. And so editors emend to *heortho*. At once comparative literary evidence is helpful. In an Old Norse poem of ripe age we are told that Othin as a typical stranger in a hall insisted on speaking from the hearth, i. e. the central space in the hall where the fire was made. From the shape of these halls, we know that the high seat was placed opposite the fire in the centre, and there a guest would naturally go. That this was the position of the hearth even in the Viking Age is clear from our picture of the Trelleborg excavations.<sup>29</sup> In other Heroic Ages too we learn a similar custom prevailed, for Odysseus went as a stranger to the hall of Nausicaa's parents and went straight to the hearth. Such diverse evidence enables us to understand the sentence in *Beowulf* and justifies emendation.

Secondly, there is a statement in *Beowulf*, l. 1118, *guthrinc astah*. This is part of the description of the burning of Hnæf and other warriors in the fighting with Finn. If we take the sentence as it stands with *astah* intransitive, the sentence would mean "the warrior ascended." But most editors want to take it as parallel to the Norse "*a bal stigi*" (mount onto the funeral pyre). We may note, however, that in line 1109 the warrior had already been placed on the pyre. From

<sup>28</sup> Cp. Plate XVIII and *Beowulf*, edited Fr. Klaeber, note to l. 404.

<sup>29</sup> Cp. Plate XVIII and article by Poul Nørlund, Trelleborg: efter fire års udgravninger (1935).



descriptions, however, of the burning of the dead with all the details of the ritual, and from literary descriptions I would suggest that we have here a simple statement " (the spirit of the) warrior soared aloft " and we may compare the statement in the Ynglingasaga that " the higher the smoke reached up aloft, the more exalted in heaven would he be who was burnt there." Such an interpretation would make the hemistich in line 3155 especially significant, *heofon rece swealg* (the heaven swallowed up the smoke).

Third, I would take three phrases which belong together, viz. ll. 926 ff., 836, and 983. The first runs in translation: " he went to the hall, stood on the 'stapol,' gazed up at the steep roof, decked with gold and at Grendel's hand." This describes the position taken up by Hrothgar when he comes to see Grendel's hand set up for all men to behold. The question always asked is " Where did he stand, inside or outside the hall?" If "stapol" means a pillar (*Beowulf* l. 2718) then he stood inside and looked up into the open timbered roof where the hand of terrific size had been placed. Pillars run down each side of the heroic hall as can be seen in the Trelleborg plan. Two other phrases are useful here: l. 983, when the nobles saw the hand, *ofer heanne hrof* (with the accusative) across the lofty roof, i. e. up in the open-timbered roof; and secondly, l. 836, where we have " *under gearne hrof* " (under the spreading roof-tree).

The difficulty in such interpretation lies in the phrase *on stapole* which we expect to mean " on the pillar." I know of no exceptional or archaic use of " on " which could support the above translation. The meaning of the Old Norse preposition *á* however, is sometimes

"nearby." Has Old English *on* ever been affected by this? Does this mean then "stood nearby the pillar"? We know from the sagas that there was a social ritual in the arrangement of the seating near the different pillars, and we also know that in the Greek Heroic Age Penelope, when she appears formally before her suitors, stands by the pillar of the well-built hall. Could this be part of the etiquette of Hrothgar's hall? All these various types of information would in my opinion justify an answer to the original question asked, viz. that Hrothgar was inside the hall when he looked on Grendel's hand.<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes, to turn to another difficulty, alternative translations offer themselves according to which type of information the student chooses. *Mid mundum* for instance, when describing how a sword is handled, literally means "with the hands." Is it, however, a generic dative? When we remember the size of these extraordinary swords and how they required great strength in their handling, we should probably infer that the phrase is to be translated literally. Here archaeology makes clear which solution it is best to choose.

To take up another point;—just as in New English words like *ring* can have half-a-dozen different meanings, so in Old English, the words *hring* and *beag* can mean different things, viz. finger-ring, arm-ring, neck-ring, coronet, battle-corset, the curved figurehead of a ship, and lastly, ring money. Often, it is true, there is an epithet added which makes clear which ring is meant. But sometimes the context sheds less light and then comparison with the object itself is of great value.

<sup>40</sup> Cp. however Klaeber's *Beowulf*, l. 926.



The focusing of all types of information on our problem undoubtedly helps the understanding of technicalities. Very often it is just the description from every point of view that gives the exact meaning. In the important account of the helmet in *Beowulf* (l. 1030 and l. 1448) the word *walan* (emended to *wala*) is cleared up by this very method. This object, as we have noticed, offered protection to the head from outside. Etymologically it is cognate with Old Norse *völ*r (a rod). In Old English the word can mean a ridge of land, a horse's collar, the string course of a basket, even a ridge on the face. We may compare the New English *weal* or *wale*. There is, as already noticed, an excellent example of a helmet in Stockholm museum with a pronounced "wala," a rolled head protection coming from the back over the top to the forehead.

We may also consider here the epithet *wirum bewunden* (set round with wires); this seems to describe a process very popular in Anglo-Saxon jewel work, i. e. filigree already described.<sup>41</sup> In Old Norse the term for this is *vfra-virki*. Old English *wir* is very commonly used for pattern on all sorts of metal objects, and for manuscript work as well. And we can see the filigree pattern found on metal imitated on vellum by the scribe.

In addition to phrases already dealt with in *Beowulf*, there is a phrase about the helmet in another poem which illustrates yet another approach to this deciphering of textual difficulty. In the poem, *Genesis B*, l. 444, the poet writes that the devil's messenger fastened on his head his *hæleth helm* (i. e. lit. warrior helmet). This is not known from Anglo-Saxon tradition and as

<sup>41</sup> Cp. Plate XIII.



Klaeber suggests must represent a misunderstanding of an Old Saxon adjective. The *Heliand* has *helith-helm* (cp. Old English *heoloth* and verb *helan*, to hide). The phrase would therefore seem to mean a helmet hiding the wearer or making him invisible just as did the Tarn Kappe of Siegfried, the German hero. Here it is comparative linguistic evidence that has helped us to understand an obscure word.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Cp. The Later Genesis, edited by Fr. Klaeber (1931), note to l. 444.

## CHAPTER V

### A SHIP-BURIAL IN SEVENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

(The Sutton Hoo Excavations and Craftsmanship)

#### INTRODUCTORY

I feel I would like to begin this chapter by giving you some idea of the personal thrill and excitement that seized upon those of us who were present at the excavation in Suffolk of a ship-burial nearly thirteen hundred years old. It was in July, 1939 (about six weeks before war was declared), I was staying in London in my club preparatory to taking my mother away for a holiday when the (London) Times announced the find. I could see at once how important it was! I thought: "I'm off at once to Suffolk!" It was soon arranged and we hastened away by car. But even then I was too late to see the precious objects buried in the center of the ship. So before I go on with my own experiences I will quote those of Mr Crawford of the Ordnance Survey who was present during the week most of the grave goods were found.

As we watched emerging daily from the earth things that we saw were unique, we felt that we were present at the unveiling of history, and that the history of our own country. There were great moments that none of us who were present will ever forget—such as the lifting of the silver plate . . . The finding of the gold clasps was another wonderful moment. As always with gold objects, they were in perfect condition, without spot or tarnish. They are unique . . . The same evening there came as a fitting climax to a crowded day what was perhaps the most unexpected

discovery of all. For some days we had been puzzled by a tantalizing patch of purple dust, sure harbinger of silver. It developed into a dome-shaped lump which Mr. Grimes undercut and placed on a zinc tray. . . . When at last he lifted the top we saw a bright silver bowl, base upwards, in perfect condition and under this was yet another bowl. In all, eight were thus uncovered.<sup>1</sup>

To return to my own experience; by the time I had arrived, the general outline of the ship had been excavated. When I reached Sutton Hoo Heath it was a lovely, sunshiny day, the excavated mound<sup>2</sup> stood silhouetted against the blue sky (you can see from the picture about how much earth had to be removed). The ship with its ribs, clinker nails and beautiful pointed prow lay open to my gaze in its trench. I was irresistibly reminded of some Old English poetic words: *sægeap naca* and *sidsfæthmed scip*, and again, *bunden stefna* and *wudu bundenne*. The excavators were hard at work on her; there were several things they still had to find out. Had she carried a sail? What about her keel? How had she been rowed, by rowlocks or thole pins? What was her steering apparatus like? How did she compare with Scandinavian ships, which had been the first ships sailing the northern seas to be found in excavation?

You can imagine how carefully the excavators had to work on a sandy soil. All sorts of precautions were taken to avert the tumbling in of the whole trench. You can see, indeed, in the picture that on the port

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Antiquity* (March 1940). To this and to the *British Museum Quarterly* XIII. 4 and *The Antiquaries Journal* XX (1940) all writers on Sutton Hoo are indebted for material and for archaeological deductions from it. There is shortly to be published, by the Trustees of the British Museum, a further book on the subject. Cp. Preface.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Plates I and XIX.



side some of the ribs have been broken by the workmen. Commander Hutchison, the ship expert, worked constantly with a pair of bellows and a dust-pan and brush, and so discovered what he wanted to find out, the nature of the steering gear attached to the stern, the thole pins and the fact that she was not stepped for a mast to carry a sail.

Before I turn to a more objective description, I feel that as I was one of the few people lucky enough to be present at the dig, I must pay tribute to the extraordinary care and skill with which it was carried out, at the same time as I acknowledge with thanks some of the excellent photographs I am able to reproduce. My regret is that, as the Danes have done with their Ladby ship, we did not undertake to make a ship museum *in situ*, by throwing up a mound over the excavation, which itself could be glazed over, so that at any rate for a while people could visit the site. But as time went on, the European situation worsened and probably this prevented full consideration of this.

### THE SITE AND THE SHIP

The site of the ship-burial lies eight miles from Ipswich, county town of Suffolk, and three from Woodbridge, on a high piece of heathland, 100 feet above the quiet River Deben. It was excavated in July and August 1939. The land here belonged to a Mrs Pretty and already under her patronage three out of the eleven mounds, in a group on the heath, had been excavated with no very interesting results. In 1939, however, she was persuaded to have what was once the largest, opened up and in due course the Office of Works under-

took the dig with Mr C. W. Phillips in charge. It was with his kind consent that during a beautiful week that summer I spent my time there. Sutton Heath, as you will see, has thickets of trees on it and is bracken-covered: the soil is a rich yellow gravel sand. Our barrow had originally covered the full 80<sup>2</sup> foot long funeral ship, but in the 1880's had been ploughed across the end of the stern and so appeared to be round. It lay south-east and north-west, the stern at the west end pointing to the River Deben, a quarter of a mile away. When digging began a great mass of dark grey soil was found on the top, obviously from the decay of grass turves and apparently placed to fill in the top of the burial. The ship itself, however, had been lowered into a trench, below the surface of the ground, and on top of this the mound was heaped. Since it had been lying in the ground for some 1300 years, it was remarkable to see it revealed to human sight in all its details, clinker-built with prow, stern, ribs, gunwale. Especially was this remarkable, for what one saw was not a real ship: but, through excellent excavation, the positions of ribs and clinch-nails were left intact, and these together with any slight traces of existing wood or iron, and discolored sand gave the semblance of a ship. It was clear that the ribs in the stern were especially strong and suitable for heavy weather and that the steering was by means of a broad-bladed oar from the starboard side. One's imagination was stirred by this ancient ship which was not a real ship, lying beneath the blue sky amid the bright yellow sand of a Suffolk heath.

\* Dimensions of ship: about 80 feet long; 14 feet greatest beam; 5 feet deep. Cp. Plate XIX.



The ship expert estimated that the prow head would rise 12½ feet above the center level of the ship, but nothing of this was left. We can, however, piece out imperfections with our thoughts and also look at the picture of an early ninth-century Viking ship found at Oseberg,<sup>4</sup> on the Oslo fjord, where in part the prow remains and where its beautiful curve reminds us of an Old English verse:

*Gewat tha ofer wægholm winde gefýsed  
flota faniheals fugle gelicost.*

"Then the foamy-necked ship fared over the sea urged by the wind, very like a bird."

Indeed the Oseberg ship is full-breasted. Ships' prows are called by the poets *hringed-stefna*, *wunden-stefna*; whereas the ships themselves are known as *hring-naca* and *hornscip*. All four terms are well explained if we take the first element of the compound to mean "curved." The compound *horn-boga* supports this (i.e. a bow curved like a horn). In the Oseberg ship the prow itself is restored, though a copy of the original.

Now our ship, as I have said, earlier than those of the Viking Age, had no arrangements for sailing: it was probably rowed by 38 oarsmen, and one result of skilful excavation was to reveal the thole pins which controlled the oars. I made out the dark shadows of five of them quite clearly and one of them has come out well in my photograph.<sup>5</sup> This picture shows too, very well, the arrangements of the clinch nails and the three-foot space between each two ribs.

<sup>4</sup> Preserved in the shiphouse with others at Bygdøy, near Oslo. Cp. Plate XVII. The two other Viking ships are the Gokstad and the Tune.

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Plate XX.



### EARLY NORTHERN SHIPS

As this is the one early ship of any size found in the United Kingdom and presumably of English make, it seems worth comparing it both with earlier and later ships. The Norwegians have preserved at Bygdøy two wonderful Viking ships from burials of the ninth century and these both show developments in ship building not found at Sutton Hoo, notably the fact that both of them carried sail. Denmark too will now be acquiring the Nydam ship of the fourth century, which should have been returned to her at the end of World War I. The Sutton Hoo seventh-century ship lies in date between these two types and may best be compared with a Norwegian ship of approximately the same date, viz. the Kvalsund boat from Møre. Although smaller in most respects, about two-thirds the size with ten oars a side, she compares with Sutton Hoo in strake construction, which represents an earlier stage of development than that of the Viking ships. She has, however, the typical construction at her stern for steering and probably carried a sail which the Sutton Hoo ship did not. The Kvalsund boat, too, unlike the Nydam has a keel. But Sutton Hoo (as far as could be made out) had not developed this important feature of ship construction. If we examine in order of date the northern ships now available for examination, beginning with the very ancient Als boat (Copenhagen), followed by the Nydam (Kiel), the Kvalsund (Norway), the Sutton Hoo (England), the Oseberg and Gokstad (Viking) both at Oslo, Norway, we can see how gradually there has developed the characteristic ship of the Viking period which enabled sailors to sail the Atlantic and be the first Europeans to see the new world.

## THE BURIAL

The central part of the ship (*"on bearm scipes"* to quote *Beowulf*) had been cleared to receive the grave goods. There, one would expect to find the remains of a skeleton or signs of a cremation, and especially in the seven foot of keel-line east of the "flambeau" where the greatest treasure lay. But here too there was surprise. No trace of a bone (human or animal), not even a tooth, was visible. It was not merely that the excavators had no definite indication of whose remains they were examining, though this latter fact was substantiated at the inquest held in August 1939, about which Professor Chadwick dryly remarked, "No satisfactory evidence of identity was offered."

It was clearly, however, a single burial, not like those found in Denmark much earlier, which were thought to celebrate a whole victory. Here there was a full equipment for one man, a warrior, though no orthodox arrangement of goods helped to indicate the lie of the body as it often does. And no personal possession, like a ring, was found although much care was spent in looking for one. There was no sign of cremation in the grave: nor were there present any miniature sets of toilet implements like those often present with cremation urns.

And so the authorities conclude that, at Sutton Hoo, we have a cenotaph. There is no good evidence for any example of cenotaphs in the Saxon period but an interesting example is described by the archaeologist Persson\* for the south of Europe. In a rich tomb at

\*He identified Dendra as Midea in Argolis, N.E. Argive Plain. Cp. *Royal Tombs at Dendra*, Chamber Tomb 2.



Dendra on the Argive plain he found instead of a corpse, a menhir, taking the place of the corpse. Could there have been a billet of wood representing the body at Sutton Hoo? If so, it would have disappeared like all the rest of the wood. Was such a billet of wood used at a ritual burial since the victim had either been killed far from home (as perhaps with the Greek example), or else had been drowned?

We know too that such ritual burials are not unknown in the Heroic Age of the Mediterranean period. For in the *Odyssey*,<sup>7</sup> Pallas Athene speaking to Telemachus says: "If thou shalt hear that he (thy father) is dead and gone, return then to thine own dear country and pile his mound and over it pay burial rites, full many as is due . . ."

But who then was it whose memory was being commemorated here? This funeral mound must commemorate a man, not a woman, as it contained a man's equipment. He would seem to be very tall and stalwartly made. He lived in the early decades of the seventh century and was almost certainly of royal birth. The country round Sutton Hoo is still known by its ancient name of East Anglia, and history tells us that Rendlesham (only four miles away) was the site of a royal residence. The magnificence of the wealth present can only point to a man of special importance and at the time we find in England a certain number of high kings or overlords. The Sutton Hoo warrior may have been one of these.

<sup>7</sup> Cp. *Odyssey* I, 289 (Butcher and Lang's translation) and *Iliad* XXIII, ll. 138 ff.



## WHO WAS HE?

The family\* to which he certainly belonged, the "Wuffingas," were at this period sometimes devoted Christians and sometimes still pagans. The great High King of the early part of the seventh century, Redwald, after being converted to Christianity by Ethelbert of Kent (the first king to be converted by St. Augustine) was later tempted by his wife to give up the Faith and return to heathendom. For a time he tried to make the best of both religions and erected altars to both Christ and idols. The son who succeeded him was, however, a Christian. The wealth and the nature of the contents of this grave point unmistakably to a pagan cenotaph. Only one object may conceivably have Christian significance, viz. a bronze fish mounted on a bronze stem and set up in the bottom of a hanging bowl, for a fish is so often a symbol of Christianity. As we have already noticed, though often horses, dogs and even human beings were slain on the death of their master yet no bones were found here. And the absence of such may indicate some respect for those people in the kingdom who had become Christians. We may note how this old custom remains when at a royal funeral today a king's horse and dog follow his body in the funeral procession.<sup>†</sup> On the other hand it is clear that the authorities were behind such a wealthy funeral pageant and one which must have caused great effort and stir in the East Anglian Kingdom.

That the cenotaph was to commemorate Redwald is


\* Cp. *Antiquity* (March 1946), p. 76.

† As late as 1900 the horse of Christian IX of Denmark was slain at Roskilde near Copenhagen at his burial. We may recall how General Patton's horse was led behind the coffin at his military funeral.

the suggestion put forward by Professor Chadwick. There were, however, no personal inscribed objects found in the grave as for example a royal ring; but there were forty gold Merovingian coins in the King's purse bag. Experts, however, do not agree about the precise date of these though they suggest that the burial probably did not take place before<sup>10</sup> 640-650 A. D. Such a date would be too late to allow for it being the burial of Redwald.

### EQUIPMENT AND GRAVE GOODS

It is impossible in one chapter to give more than a general idea of the variety of objects buried in the ship. We know it was the custom in a ship-burial to lay such objects in the center and to erect over them a wooden tent<sup>11</sup> which in our ship measured 17½ feet long. But it is specially interesting that at Sutton Hoo this erection seems to have been thatched with turves just as later we find Viking Age houses had turfed-over roofs.

Within this wooden tent erection the grave goods were laid arranged in the shape of a large ; and it was at the west end that the best objects were placed: but the picture<sup>12</sup> of the plan of the arrangement of grave-goods will give necessary details. Among the objects buried was the full equipment of a royal warrior, sword, spears, axe, chainmail, knife, helmet, shield,

<sup>10</sup> *Cp. Antiquity* (March 1940), p. 64 and *British Museum Quarterly* XIII, 4, p. 126; also Chapter III above, note 23.

<sup>11</sup> The thought of a ship as a house occurs frequently in the north. Our plate XVIII representing the plan of a camp of ship-shaped houses is specially interesting. I visited Trelleborg (Zealand, near the Great Belt) in 1938 and saw the camp containing 16 houses, each 100 (Roman) feet long and according to medieval sources each billeted 100 men. *Cp. also Chapter IV, note 59.*

<sup>12</sup> *Cp. Plate XXI.*



and a hone (for sharpening weapons); his personal ornaments in gold, i. e. his purse bag, buckle, a pair of large clasps, and several smaller ornaments; a set of silver table appointments, dishes, bowls, drinking horns and spoons. In addition there were domestic objects, like those found in the Viking ship at Oseberg, bucket, bronze bowls, and several cauldrons; textile material in a state of rottenness, some of which possibly had been a small pillow. There was also the remains of a pair of shoes, and a large bag. Finally, I may mention, at the west end lay what has been called an iron flambeau and in one of the bowls a small wooden object, perhaps a small musical instrument.

These objects at the moment are all being cleaned, mended and attended to before being exhibited at the British Museum. You will imagine how eagerly this exhibition will be appreciated when I remind readers that the objects as soon as they were dug up were removed to the British Museum, but, as a blitz was expected, they were packed up and hidden in a safe place, where they have lain for some six years.

### THE ARMOR

As we have seen by references to the Sutton Hoo warrior equipment in previous chapters, there was much in it to arrest the attention of the student of Anglo-Saxon literature. Almost all of it was in very bad condition and it is only now being reconditioned and made presentable. The equipment included chainmail, helmet, sword, spears, knife (?) and battle axe.

Chainmail of this date has only been found at Benty Grange in the United Kingdom; only one other helmet has been discovered; swords are scarce and the Sutton



Hoo specimen (though not a ring sword) is particularly elaborate and beautiful. Associated with the dead there were no less than seven spears. The umbo of the shield was a magnificent object like one excavated at Vendel (Uppland, Sweden). The wooden surround of course had disappeared. It is uncertain whether the warrior carried the usual knife but he certainly had an axe which I was told was two feet six inches long and made entirely of iron, handle and head. Finally there was a whetstone already described. Even now all the objects are not available for examination by the Anglo-Saxon student though at the time of writing more and more of them are ready for public exhibition.

At the moment it is largely by exclamation and query that such a student can express surmises about the material from Sutton Hoo, material which has only been handled by a very few: What a tremendous size this Sutton Hoo warrior seems to have been if we remember only his battleax, buckle and huge clasps! Why should he be buried with the remarkable ornamented whetstone? Was it his mace and indicative of the fact that he was a devotee of the Super-Smith Weland, the marvelous maker of weapons in the north? Was this personage a bard as well as a warrior like kings in Old English heroic poetry that we find in his grave (as in no other) the remains of a small musical instrument?

### GOLD OBJECTS

Let us next turn to the most valuable objects found, the gold objects. There are four things at least which have to be dealt with: the purse and its fittings, a pair of large clasps, a large buckle, and several smaller orna-

ments. The value of these in modern money is very considerable: the newspaper placards in Suffolk at the discovery proclaimed the find to be worth thousands of pounds. I am not aware of any official valuation.

Of the purse and its fittings<sup>12</sup> the framework and ornaments have been preserved. The former is of gold, enriched with garnet and mosaic glass, and bordered with filigree work. It was attached to the belt by straps, and has a gold sliding clasp to open and close it. It is 7½ inches across, the size of an average handbag today, and its face is adorned with seven appliqued ornaments, three in pairs and one alone, and a set of jeweled studs. We find unexpectedly on these ornaments as on the large clasps two kinds of workmanship—champlevé and cloisonné techniques. Strange and bizarre to modern eyes are the patterns represented, and one pair has the well known design commonly known as "Daniel in the Lions Den"—a pattern not uncommon among the Franks. The other shows a pair of birds, a larger and a smaller. The purse contained 40 gold Merovingian coins, and two small gold ingots.

We have already spoken of the skill required and I need only add that you must imagine this object of lustrous gold glowing with red and at times set off by white and blue mosaic glass. The purse, as we have said, would be suspended from the belt, and though the material of both has disappeared some of the strap mounts exist. The jewel work on one, a pattern like a skein of wool, called guilleoche, strikes even the unob-

<sup>12</sup> As far as I know there is no mention of a purse bag in Old English verse, though we may recall the vivid description in *Beowulf* of the troll's bag in which he puts his victims. "His bag hung capacious and handsome, firmly fastened. It had been made skillfully of dragon skins by the skill of the devil." Cp. plate XXII.



servant eye as being an extraordinary achievement in this medium.

I must deal very briefly with the next object, which archaeologists consider most wonderful, a pair of gold clasps, each one hinged and fastened with an animal-headed pin.<sup>14</sup> We have already noted how common clasps are in Anglo-Saxon graves, but these, both for size and ornament, are amazing. I well remember the impression they made on the excavator himself, and how he described them to me, saying that the man who wore them must be a giant. Officially they are given as each 4¾ inches long. They are lavishly decorated with cloisonné and champlevé work, with tiny designs in gold filigree as a background to the design of the figure of the boar. One of the most attractive features is the elegance with which the lapidary has inserted tiny pieces of shaped garnet into the gold plate. On examination in 1946 I discovered these clasps had as many as twenty gold loops on the back of them, showing that they were meant to be attached to material. Attention has already been drawn to clasps eight inches long, obviously to fasten a belt. Here, however, a slight curve is against this, but such a curve would fit onto a shoulder. Could they be a pair of epaulettes? I note Mr Phillips queries whether they could belong to the shoulders of a leather cuirass, but I know of none such at this early period. However, we may note that the Öland plate picture suggests decoration on the shoulders of the heroes.

Thirdly, we must look at the picture of the great gold buckle<sup>15</sup> reckoned to be the most valuable object in

<sup>14</sup> Cp. Plates XXVI and XXII.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Plate XXIII.



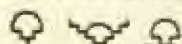
modern money. The buckle plate is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, and inscribed with intricate interlace of animal ornament. We notice the heads, eyes, and probosces on the intertwined animals, and also the beautiful geometric pattern round the buckle itself. All this is enriched with niello work, that is, by an inlay of black to throw up and enhance the design. Lastly, it is important to notice the small animal engraved at the base of the triangular plate.

The tongue of the buckle is not movable, but it can be used by pressing downwards the hoop which is hinged; material can also be placed between the upper and lower faces of the plate which can be unlocked.

The last word of the archaeologists has not been said on these objects, and on the style and connexions of their patterns. Further work on them will doubtless reveal much of interest. We would naturally associate such work with cloisonné work from Kent, well illustrated on the Kingston Brooch. But both in certain patterns and processes it does not agree with Kent, viz. by its use of blue and white mosaic glass with the garnets, by its mushroom-shaped<sup>18</sup> cells, and by the patterns of sunk-cell combined with applied-cell work. Where did these new designs come from? There seems little doubt but that this work was done in East Anglia.

We know that East Anglia became an important kingdom after the reign of Ethelbert of Kent in the seventh century. The skill in jewelry of the Kentish people (the Jutes) has been known for long; it is only now that we realize there may have been a golden age

<sup>18</sup> Mushroom cells on objects at Sutton Hoo.



of craftsmanship in East Anglia as well. Even in the brief information given us by Bede about this early East Anglian dynasty<sup>17</sup> we can see there must have been again and again contact of cultures across the channel: this too is reflected in the patterns of the craftsmen. But even more important (as we have already stated) are the indications of contacts with the Scandinavian countries. Sutton Hoo therefore illustrates the intersection of art tradition and the carrying of old traditions into a new era.

### SILVER OBJECTS

I propose to deal with the silver objects<sup>18</sup> very briefly as they are all foreign in make and imported. Two large silver dishes were found, one of twenty-eight and one of fifteen inches in diameter. Both of them are Byzantine work, the larger to be dated in the period of Anastasius I, an emperor ruling at the time when Beowulf's uncle Hygelac was killed: the smaller has a classical head in profile on the center front of the dish. But for the student of Letters the next is the most important silver find, a set of nine silver bowls (one of which had been reduced to silver chloride), shallow and circular (about nine inches in diameter). None of them have a rim and all of them are decorated inside with an equal-armed cross of varied pattern. It must have been a very impressive find as apparently seven of the bowls were as bright as when they were put in the soil. I want to associate this find with some drinking horns lying near by. Unfortunately these had been very badly crushed and difficult to identify, but it does seem likely that

<sup>17</sup> Cp. Bede: *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* II Chapter 15.

<sup>18</sup> Cp. Plate XXIV and *Antiquity* (March 1940), Chapter V.



there were nine to correspond to the silver bowls.<sup>24</sup> In addition were discovered at least six small globular bottles with gilt bronze rims, together with one more silver bowl. Were these table appointments of royalty? How often we are told in *Beowulf* and other heroic verse of the various kinds of drinking and mixing vessels that are used and circulated, though the drinking horn itself is not mentioned in the poem. Here in this tomb we have something equal in splendor to the riches and luxury suggested for the life of the nobles in their halls as described in Old English verse like *Beowulf* and *Judith*.

There were a number of other objects buried, but I propose to select only two for comment. First, what was probably a miniature musical instrument. Unofficially I was told it was not more than six inches long and it was found in bits in a hanging bowl.<sup>25</sup> It was pieced together out of bits of wood and it would seem there were also three small pegs of wood or bone similar to the four pegs which are in position, i. e. in four of the five holes in the instrument itself. Perhaps it is symbolic; but for the student of Old English verse it is particularly interesting as it may suggest that the royal personage commemorated was a bard as well as a ruler. We know it was not uncommon for the Teutonic kings themselves to take up the harp and improvise to celebrate an occasion, even as King Hrothgar himself does in *Beowulf*. I am not aware of any similar instrument being found in any other Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian grave. Secondly I might well again take up here a suggestion I have worked out more fully in Chapter IV

<sup>24</sup> Anglo-Saxons used cups and beakers, as well as horns for drinking.

<sup>25</sup> Cp. *Antiquaries Journal* XX (1940), Appendix II, p. 199.



about the object called by the archaeologists flambeau or lampstand. I have ventured to suggest that this object must be all that is left of the royal banner:<sup>21</sup> and I have given references from *Beowulf* in support of this. We know how in battles and on other occasions a banner is a special sign of royalty. Harold the Saxon fought under the royal standard of Wessex at the battle of Hastings: at Buckingham Palace, London, the Royal Standard is broken at the flagstaff when the King comes into residence. The material of the banner, if there were any, would probably have disappeared but the metal part would remain and there would be no more suitable object to put into the grave of royalty.

More detailed work on these objects is needed to be done by the archaeologists before the whole tale is told: for some general archaeological conclusions we are already indebted to the Keeper of Medieval Antiquities in the British Museum, who received them as an amazingly generous gift to the nation from the late Mrs Pretty on whose land the barrow was situated, and where other barrows await investigation. He stressed in the pages of the *British Museum Quarterly* what even the average person constantly feels in connection with Sutton Hoo, its surprisingness. Readers of *Beowulf* must have often wondered whether England herself had not a burial-ship hidden in her soil. In 1939 they found she had, but as if in a modern detective thriller it was a ship-burial without a corpse. Next, it is surprising to find such jewels in East Anglia of that period at all, for hitherto it is only in Kent (or from Kentish influence) that such workmanship has been revealed, both in pattern and process. Lastly, we know that Anglo-

<sup>21</sup> Cp. Chapter IV, note 33.

Saxon craftsmanship in Kent had close links with the work of the Merovingian Franks, but other foreign influence is most marked in Suffolk, that of Scandinavian workmanship, especially Swedish.

I should like to finish with two quotations from literature, one from an English writer in the seventeenth century who lived in East Anglia and one from a modern novelist,<sup>11</sup> an American, whose book deals with East Anglia and Baltimore, U.S.A. I will take the latter first:—

(We walked past) "the lucid and peaceable Deben, scoured twice daily by the salted Northern Sea . . . or through another turnstile one climbed the sandy slope to Sutton Heath, a wide expanse of turf, gorse, and bracken, the paradise of rabbits . . . The heath has two colors: one of outbound morning, pale blue and pink spotted with the egg yellow of the gorse: the other, deepening to the mackerel and purple of the sleepy return. 'It's the oldest part of England,' Uncle Dan always said." . . .

From Christopher Morley let us turn next to Sir Thomas Browne:—<sup>12</sup>

. . . "Tis time," he writes, gazing on some Norfolk urns, "to observe occurrences and let nothing remarkable escape us: the supinuity of elder days hath left so much in silence, or time hath so martyred the records, that the most industrious heads do find no easy work to erect a new Britannia . . .

"Tis opportune to look back upon old times and contemplate our forefathers. Simplicity flies away and iniquity comes at long strides upon us. We have enough to do to make up ourselves from present and past times and the whole stage of things scarce serveth for our instruction." . . .

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<sup>11</sup> Cp. C. Morley, *Thoroughfare*.

<sup>12</sup> Cp. *Hydriotaphia or Urne-Buriall*.

## PLATES





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PLATE 1. Section Two North and Step-upward.



PLATE II Site of burial mound of Clannairn the Viking, Iceland.



1.



2.



3.

PLATE III Anglo-Saxon burial-grounds

1. High Down, Somerset (from South)
2. Down above Folkestone, Kent
3. Branch Down Tunstall, Kent





PLATE IV. Amla-Sævon Burial-ground, Saffron Walden, Essex.

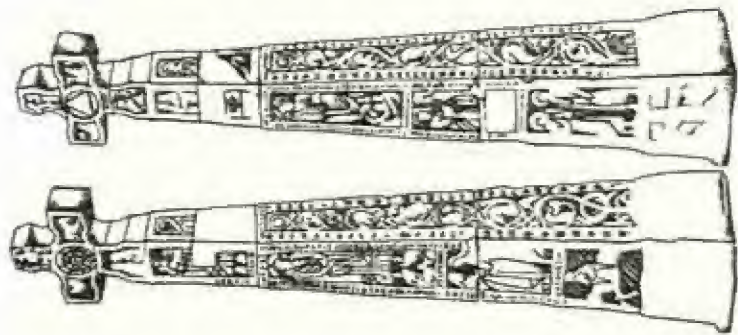


PLATE V The Rylowed Crosses, all 4 sides.



PLATE VII The Hallowell Cross, panel of the Annunciation.



PLATE VI The top of the Cross points with Mary Magdalene and the Hosts of the Word.





PLATE VIII Teutonic Warrior, modern reconstruction.



PLATE IX Bronze plate from Tinsulanä, Öland, Sweden. (Original 14 x 27 inches)



PLATE X Part of the Franks Casket from the British Museum.



PLATE XI Part of Diptych from Halberstadt, Germany.



PLATE XII The Kingston Hoard. (Approximate size of original.)





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PLATE XV. Reconstructed Helmet,  
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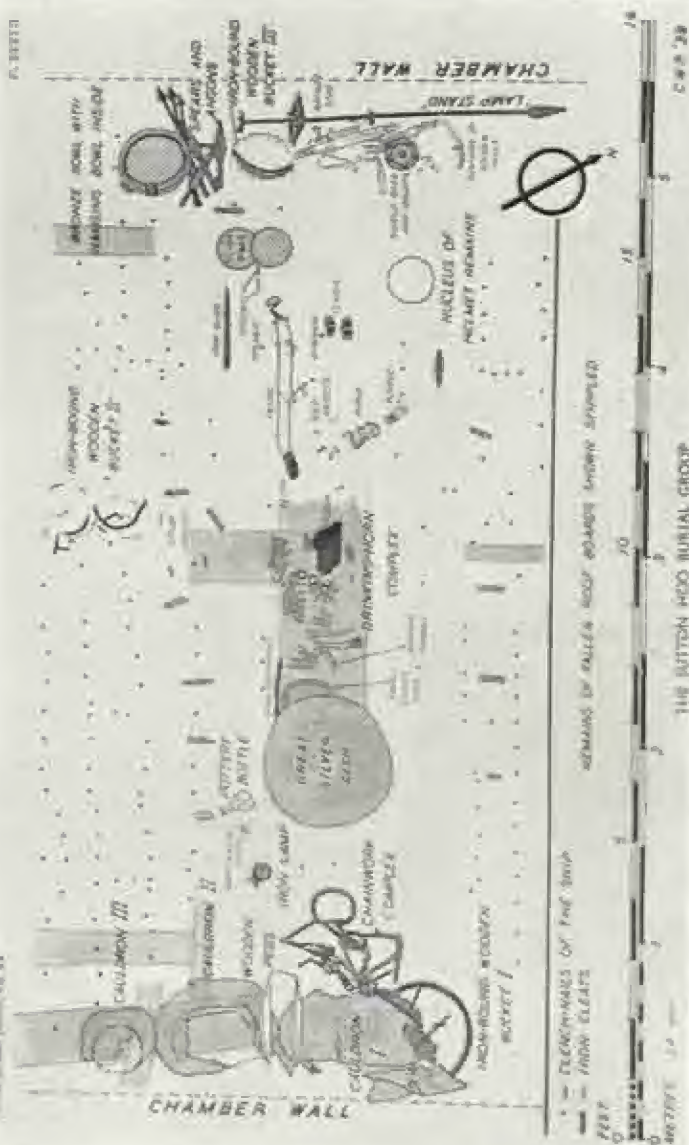




PLATE XIX Excavation of Sutton Hoo Burial-Ship, Suffolk. (The Bow)



PLATE XX Ribs, clench-nails and chain-pin. Sutton Hoo Burial-Ship.

[illegible]



PLATES XXII and XXIII Chief gold objects excavated at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk.  
Purse-frames; Buckle and Clasp.





PLATE XXIV Group of silver objects excavated at Sultan Hos.



PLATE XXV The Horn of Whorstone, Section B.



PLATE XXVI. Sword and Clasp, Section B, in the grave.



Plate XXVII Skull-bone and Ornament, Saffron Hill, in the grave.





PLATE XXVIII The pan stand (? hulls-embark). Sutton Hoo, in the grave.









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